

Share images of different housing types with your community to help minimize fears of increased density. OPTICOS DESIGN, INC.



DUPLEX SIDE BY SIDE



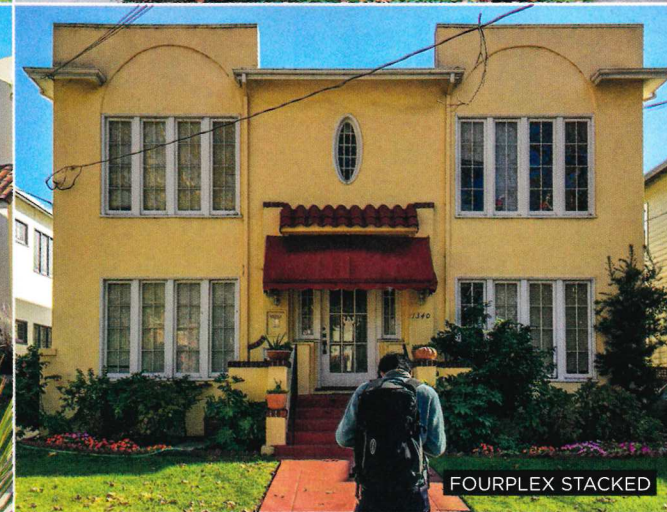
DUPLEX STACKED



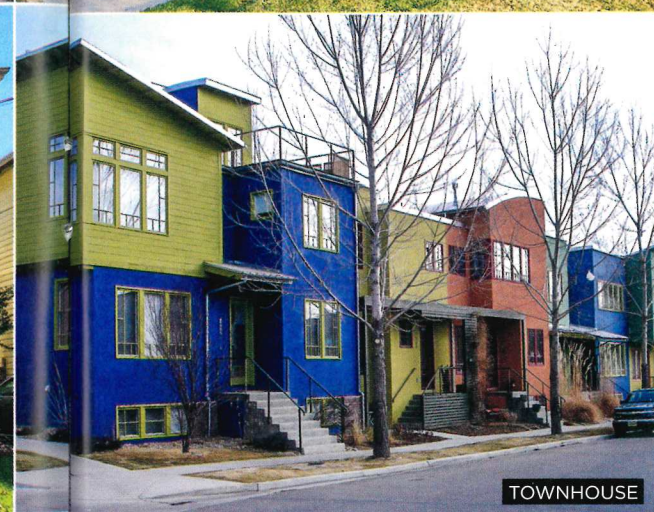
COURTYARD



COTTAGE COURT



FOURPLEX STACKED



TOWNHOUSE



MULTIPLEX MEDIUM



TRIPLE STACKED



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HOW-TO

## 9 ZONING HACKS FOR MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

Thoughtful tweaks to your community's code can have a big impact on housing diversity and density. *By Kati Woock*

ONE-THIRD OF AMERICAN households are made up of a single individual. Up to 85 percent of households will not include children by 2025. By 2030, one in five Americans will be over the age of 65.

These statistics add up to a simple fact: Demand is high for smaller homes, lower living costs, walkable neighborhoods, and places for people to age in place. Yet zoning across the U.S. largely discourages these features.

That's because codes tend to be based on residential density, which is measured in dwelling units per acre, and most prioritize single-family housing. As of 2019, a *New York Times* report found that "it is illegal on 75 percent of the residential land in many American cities to build anything other than a detached single-family home." Not only are large multifamily buildings banned from many neighborhoods, but so are smaller housing types that cost less than a single-family home: side-by-side and stacked duplexes, triplexes, townhouses. These constitute "missing middle housing,"

or "house-scale buildings that just happen to have multiple units in them," says Daniel Parolek of Opticos Design, who coined the term in 2010.

In the past few years, Oregon, Minneapolis, California, and other states and cities have launched zoning reform efforts to better promote housing affordability, diversity, and density. If your community lacks the political will to make these kinds of sweeping changes, a few thoughtful tweaks can still make a big impact. Adapted from Parolek's APA Learn course ([bit.ly/zhacks](https://bit.ly/zhacks)), these nine zoning hacks—and a bonus tip—can help planners increase local density.

**1 REDUCE MINIMUM LOT SIZE.** Does your code require two lots to build a duplex or a fourplex? If a builder must aggregate multiple lots to build a small multiunit building, your minimum lot sizes are too big.

Instead, replace minimum lot sizes with minimum lot widths and tie types of buildings to the lot's width, not its square footage.

**2 REGULATE MAXIMUM WIDTH AND DEPTH.** Replace rear setback requirements with maximum depths to ensure house-scale buildings and document existing building sizes to create a set of maximum widths and depths. These restrictions also discourage demolitions that might replace small single-family homes with very large ones.

**3 INCREASE ALLOWED DENSITIES.** Rather than applying a blanket density increase to all types, officials in Medford, Oregon, tested different building types on various lot sizes to find density numbers that compliment specific neighborhoods.

**4 ALLOW FOR MORE HOUSING TYPES AND REVISIT STRUCTURE SIZES.** As Joe Zehnder, chief planner for Portland, Oregon's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, says, "if the house size is the same, why do you care how many units are in there?" In Portland, zoning changes now allow some-one building on a 5,000-square-foot lot to construct up to four units divided between a main building and detached accessory dwelling units. Five or six units are allowed if half of them are affordable to low-income residents.

**5 LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD FOR SMALLER UNITS.** More density doesn't always mean bigger buildings. In Santa Barbara, California, an average unit size ordinance provides for increased density as the average unit size decreases. This enables missing middle housing by allowing for greater density, even in smaller structures.

Respect the neighborhood context, but don't be slavish to it—most neighborhoods are made of different building types.

**6 REDUCE OR ELIMINATE PARKING MINIMUMS.** "If you want missing middle [housing], you need to fix your parking standards," says Parolek. "We've done a better job delivering houses for cars than we have delivering houses for people." If you require more than one

off-street parking space per unit, it's not economically viable or physically possible to create missing middle housing on infill lots. Instead, opt for one parking space—or even none—per unit and no guest parking.

In suburban or rural areas, like Beaufort County, South Carolina, driving might be a fact of life. Try being creative about how you design parking so it can become an extra unit in the future, if factors like demand or public transit change.

**7 RETHINK PRIVATE OPEN SPACE REQUIREMENTS.** While the motivations behind private open space requirements are good, they typically result in unattractive balconies that are used primarily for storage. In a walkable, urban neighborhood, the amenity is the environment. Rather than delivering outdoor amenities on a unit-by-unit basis, focus on shared spaces like courtyards and vibrant streets.

**8 ALLOW MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING EVERYWHERE (IF POSSIBLE).** Is more than 20 percent of your land area zoned exclusively for single-family housing? Then you need to change the boundaries limiting missing middle housing to deliver it effectively and equitably. In Portland, Oregon, planners proposed allowing middle housing types in all districts across the city unless there is a physical limitation, like flooding or landslide hazards.

In response to displacement concerns, Zehnder says, "the more places where we allow this to happen, the less it's going to overwhelm any individual place." And development won't happen all at once: Portland planners estimate an add of 4,000 new units over the next 15 years. But if a single house in a wealthy neighborhood is replaced with three units, that alone can help take the pressure off demolitions in an area with lower incomes, Zehnder says.

**9 IMPROVE INFILL DESIGN.** Respect the neighborhood context, but don't be slavish to it—most neighborhoods are made of different building types. (Tuck-under townhouses that face away from the street, however, can quickly overwhelm available infill lots without enhancing neighborhoods, Parolek says.) Focus on a number of stories instead of a maximum height, and limit where parking is allowed. You can also limit curb cuts and garage frontage to preserve the street front.

Take the opportunity to increase accessibility, too. In Portland, new codes require lots with three or more units to ensure that at least one is "visitable," with a no-step entry, ground-floor bathroom, and ground-floor living space.

**BONUS: FRAME THE CONVERSATION.** When you're presenting your ideas to the community, it can be helpful to avoid terms that might have negative connotations to some, like "density," "multifamily," or "upzoning." Present zoning changes as a way to offer new housing choices or options. Focus on form and scale, not density metrics. Imagery ([missingmiddlehousing.com](http://missingmiddlehousing.com)) can help community members understand how missing middle types could look in their neighborhoods.

*Kati Woock is a freelance editor and writer based in Michigan.*

## THE PROFESSION

# LAUNCH A SUCCESSFUL DIVERSITY INITIATIVE

How to translate values into action. By Bobbie Albrecht

**E**QUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI) initiatives are all about translating values into actions. In a recent APA Learning Circle, planners shared the steps their agencies and firms are taking to do just that.

In 2020, for example, Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti issued an executive directive on fairness, diversity, equal opportunity, and transparency in city government. In response, the LA city planning department hired its first chief equity officer, planner Faisal Roble, that same year.

And on the private side, as part of a recent reorganization, global engineering consulting firm WSP developed a three-year strategy to increase and support racial and gender diversity of staff. A significant part of that has been a new program to develop better leadership opportunities for people of color and women within the company.

Lee Pearce, the manager of talent management for WSP USA, says that a key driver for change has been the formation of a representative council, a diverse group of high-performing employees selected to act as a conduit

between employees and the executive team. Council members serve as mentors and role models, provide valuable insights on professional development skills that are needed, and suggest changes to the leadership pipeline.

A commitment to diversity and inclusion is a start, but to fully benefit from increased racial and gender diversity, organizations must be willing to change the culture and power structure. Organizations must not only have strong support from leadership to promote fairness and equal participation at all levels, but also a commitment to a frank analysis of the current culture, practices, and policies. And as in any area of work, employees need ongoing training and support to accomplish goals and evaluate progress.

To ensure EDI policies and initiatives produce their desired results, firms and planning departments must create a program with measurable outcomes. Below, find three ways to help get you started.

*Bobbie Albrecht is APA's career services manager.*

## THREE STEPS TO MEASURABLE OUTCOMES FOR AN EDI PROGRAM



### GATHER DATA

Review pertinent departmental functions, including but not limited to recruitment, hiring, training, retention, promotions, and contracting. Create a mechanism to hear from employees. The city of Los Angeles uses focus groups to do this, while WSP's representative council of employees both gathers information and makes recommendations. Analyze your office policies and practices to determine whether they are helping or hindering efforts.



### SET GOALS

Create a list of equity indicators specific to a department or office and describe how the department can develop reliable data to track progress on equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts. Consider, too, training goals and retention as indicators of progress.



### CREATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The plans should identify any anticipated challenges, include a reporting and auditing component, and designate staff who will be principally charged with administering the proposed plan. Identify disparities in workforce outcomes, too. When LA measured hiring by gender, it discovered a gap and worked toward closing it. Today, 57 percent of the city staff are women.