

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
STAFF REPORT FOR THE DESIGN REVIEW AND PRESERVATION BOARD  
**August 21, 2025**

**PROJECT TITLE**

Missing Middle Housing

**APPLICANT**

City of Santa Rosa

**ADDRESS/LOCATION**

Various

**PROPERTY OWNER**

Various

**ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER**

Various

**FILE NUMBERS**

Not Applicable

**APPLICATION DATES**

Not applicable

**APPLICATION COMPLETION DATES**

Not applicable

**REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS**

Not applicable

**FURTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED**

Zoning Code Text Amendment and Zoning  
Map Amendment

**PROJECT SITE ZONING**

Various

**GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION**

Various

**PROJECT PLANNER**

Amy Nicholson, Supervising Planner

**RECOMMENDATION**

Provide Comments

Agenda Item # 9.1

For Design Review and Preservation Meeting of: August 21, 2025

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
DESIGN REVIEW AND PRESERVATION BOARD

TO: CHAIR JONES-CARTER AND MEMBERS OF THE DESIGN  
REVIEW AND PRESERVATION BOARD

FROM: AMY NICHOLSON, SUPERVISING PLANNER  
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

AGENDA ACTION: STUDY SESSION

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Planning and Economic Development Department that the Design Review and Preservation Board conduct a Study Session on the Draft Missing Middle Housing Code Section and Draft Guidance Document and provide comments to staff.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Missing Middle Housing (MMH) Initiative is to develop standards to accommodate the construction, replacement or conversion of standard single-family homes and remodels to produce Missing Middle infill housing. The Initiative is intended to increase the production of housing units of varying types and affordability, in walkable areas of the city. Criteria for these new units includes form-based design standards that ensure a scale compatible with single family neighborhoods. Missing Middle Housing is often referred to as adding “*gentle density*” because it blends in well with existing neighborhoods.

The role of the Design Review Board (Board) for this Study Session is to review and provide comments on the draft Missing Middle Housing (-MMH) Code Section and Guidance Document. Comments from the Board will be shared with the Planning Commission and City Council when they review and act on the proposed Zoning Code Text and Zoning Map amendments.

## BACKGROUND

### 1. Project Description

*“Missing middle housing consists of house-scale buildings with multiple units in walkable neighborhoods.”* (Opticos Design, Inc.)

**Housing Diversity and Affordability:** MMH units are smaller than most single-family homes (generally under 1,000 square feet) and therefore, tend to be less expensive to rent or purchase than larger single-family homes. MMH can also provide opportunities for existing homeowners to build additional units on their property to house extended family or to rent out for passive income. Multiple units in MMH structures—duplex, triplex, quad, multiplex, cottage court, courtyard buildings and town homes—contribute to the range of options available for people looking for housing. MMH will help meet the need for a more diverse housing stock overall, and potentially create units that are generally more affordable for people within the moderate-income range.

**Increased Density:** Missing Middle building types typically range in density from eight dwelling units(du)/acre to up to 70 du/acre, depending on the building type and lot size. Sixteen du/acre is generally the minimum density required to support most types of transit; this is also generally the minimum density required to support neighborhood-serving, walkable retail, and services. Due to the smaller footprints of MMH types, even on an individual block, the perceived density is usually quite low—they do not look like dense buildings.<sup>1</sup> MMH is often referred to as adding “gentle density” because it adds units without changing the visual character of neighborhoods. This compatibility makes MMH a powerful infill tool.

**Regulating Form Shapes the Public Realm:** The proposed Missing Middle Housing (-MMH) combining district is intended to enable the development of multiple-unit housing types, compatible in scale with single-family houses in Santa Rosa’s walkable neighborhoods. Lot sizes, setbacks, building widths, depths, and heights are clearly defined so that structures blend in with single-family structures. Missing Middle Housing buildings are also required to front onto the public realm (formed by public streets, paseos, greenways, and other features) and to utilize a frontage type (such as a usable porch, stoop, or dooryard) that contributes to informal sociability. One of the organizing principles of MMH is that: *Regulating the form of structures incrementally shapes the public realm* (Opticos Design, Inc.).

**Attractive and Connected Neighborhoods:** By focusing on building form and the public realm, Missing Middle Housing emphasizes creating not just individual housing units, but whole neighborhoods that are attractive and connected—with sidewalks, street trees, planting strips, public and private green spaces, greenways, bioswales and other features that bring nature into the city. These neighborhoods provide

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<sup>1</sup> Opticos Design, Guidance Document, p. 13.

pedestrian/bicycle access to nearby services and transit and contribute to a walkable and bikeable public realm.

**Shared Spaces to Gather:** MMH requires private outdoor space for smaller parcels (less than 3 acres), and public space (publicly accessible during designated hours) for larger projects of three or more acres. At civic spaces, pedestrian crossings are prioritized over vehicular movement to ensure a walkable environment.

**Sustainable Development:** MMH promotes compact infill development and more efficient use of available resources and infrastructure. It also encourages planting of street trees and vegetation in the public realm as well as within the interior of properties. Increasing vegetation helps to reduce the heat island effect caused by surfaces such as asphalt and building materials absorbing ultraviolet radiation from the sun and then releasing it, often during evening hours long after the sun has gone down (resulting in higher nighttime temperatures). The development of planting strips and greenways also increases infiltration and the replenishment of groundwater and reduces flooding by reducing the rate and quantity of runoff.

In environments of primarily house-scale residential buildings, streets and paseos typically include more landscaping and less hardscape; in a mixed-use context characterized by connected or block-scale buildings, streets and paseos typically include more hardscape than landscape with an emphasis on street trees in wells/grates.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Project History

|                     |                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May, 2021           | Commencement of the Missing Middle Housing Initiative                                                                    |
| October, 2021       | Existing Conditions and Recommendations Report prepared by Opticos Design, Inc.                                          |
| November, 2021      | Santa Rosa Missing Middle Housing Financial Feasibility Study, Methodology and Findings, prepared by Strategic Economics |
| Fall, 2021          | Lot Testing Analysis prepared by Opticos Design, Inc.                                                                    |
| April 19, 2022      | Community Workshop                                                                                                       |
| Spring/Summer, 2023 | Missing Middle Housing project incorporated into the General Plan process.                                               |
| July, 2024          | Draft Missing Middle Housing (-MMH) Code Section and Guidance Document prepared by Opticos Design, Inc.                  |
| October, 2024       | Revised Draft Missing Middle Housing (-MMH) Code Section and Guidance Document, prepared by Opticos Design, Inc.         |

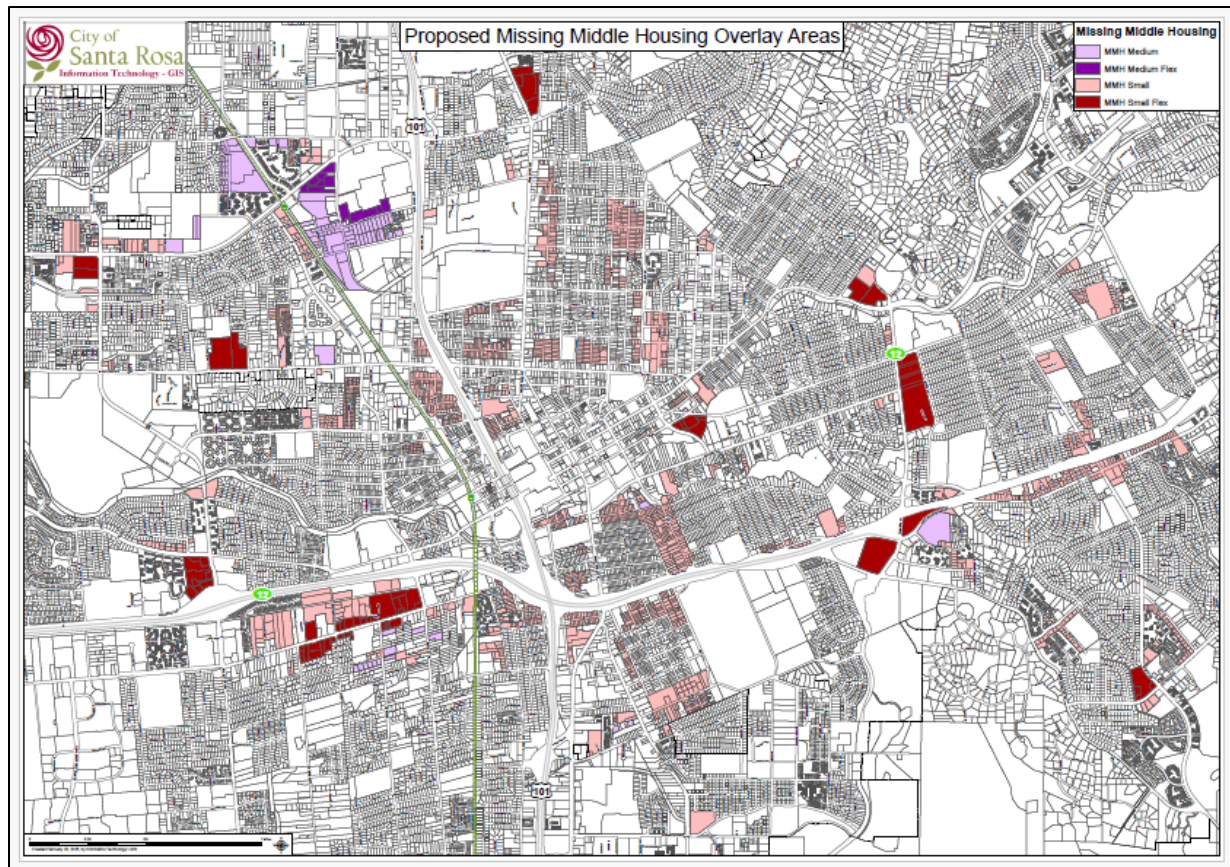
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<sup>2</sup> Opticos Design, Inc., Guidelines Document p. 64.

## ANALYSIS

### 1. Draft Missing Middle Housing (-MMH) Code Section and Overlay Map

The General Plan 2050 project introduces a Missing Middle Housing component to expand the housing options allowed on various parcels throughout the City. To implement Missing Middle Housing, a Zoning Code Text Amendment and Zoning Code Map Amendment are proposed which allow opportunities and outline development standards for constructing Missing Middle Housing. The proposed Missing Middle Housing Overlay Areas map is included below.



Areas that would support MMH include Medium Density Multifamily Residential (R-2) (medium density), Multifamily Residential (R-3) (medium high density), Transit Village-Residential (TV-R), and Transit Village Mixed Use (TV-M). Base zoning will continue to apply across Santa Rosa's residential neighborhoods. The MMH Combining District, where applied, will function as an overlay—enabling more housing choices through MMH types (§ 20-28.100).

The proposed Missing Middle Housing (-MMH) Code also allows for a Missing Middle Housing (MMH) Bonus of potential additional housing units within these zones. The

MMH Bonus would be determined on a case-by-case basis for qualifying projects. To qualify for a MMH Bonus, the proposed development, including bonus units, would need to comply with all regulations in the MMH Code section, including but not limited to those pertaining to lot size; design sites; applicable MMH building type; building width, depth, and height; frontage type; access driveway and parking; and private or public open space, as applicable (§ 20-28.100). The MMH Combining District regulates the built form, scale, and massing of MMH types, to increase housing diversity without resulting in dramatic changes to the character of existing neighborhoods. This enables a neighborhood to incorporate both single-unit and multi-unit buildings while maintaining a consistent vision for and character of the overall streetscape.

## 2. Draft Missing Middle Housing Guidance Document

The MMH Guidance Document supplements the information provided in the MMH Code development standards. The two documents are designed to be used together. The Guidance Document provides an overview of Missing Middle Housing as a concept; its relevance to Santa Rosa; a Quick Code Guide outlining the steps for development in the MMH Combining District; and examples of all types of housing and frontage types. It is a “how to” guide for implementing the (-MMH) Code section. It describes the process for choosing appropriate building types and frontages in existing neighborhoods, and discusses the development of large sites, civic spaces, and throughfares.

## 3. Public Comments from April 19, 2022, Workshop

- Encourage a wide view of where Missing Middle Housing can be located.
- Encourage both for rent and for sale units.
- Encourage a broad range of innovative prototypes for Missing Middle Housing

## FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact related to this item as the funding has been allocated for the Missing Middle Housing project.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The project is being reviewed as part of the General Plan 2050 Environmental Impact Report which is tentatively scheduled for action by the City Council in June 2025. Therefore, no additional environmental analysis is required for this project.

## DESIGN REVIEW BOARD REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

## PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Public notification is not required for study session items. However, information about the project and Design Review Board study session was provided as part of a City Connections notification and was also sent by email to the General Plan email list (GP.deliver.gov), as the Initiative is a component of the General Plan and is being reviewed as part of the General Plan 2050 Environmental Impact Report. Project materials are also available on the project website (<https://www.srcity.org/3495/Missing-Middle-Housing>). Pursuant to Government Code Section 65091, where necessary, the city has incorporated notice procedures to the blind, aged, and disabled communities. These procedures include audio amplifier/assistive listening device support at public meetings, closed captioning, and optical character recognition conversion of electronic notices.

Additionally, notification was provided by U.S. Mail to the property owners of specific parcels that are proposed to be included in the Missing Middle Housing Overlay Zone Areas. These parcels are within areas of the city that are walkable, or potentially walkable in the future, where property owners have the option of constructing Missing Middle Housing if they develop or redevelop their properties.

### ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – MMH Code  
Attachment 2 – MMH Definitions  
Attachment 3 – MMH Guidance Document  
Attachment 4 – Existing Conditions Report + Recommendations  
Attachment 5 – Public Correspondence

### CONTACT

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