Missing Middle Working Group Kickoff – Expanded Public Synopsis from July 28, 2026
The City of Charlottesville has convened a "Missing Middle Working Group" to take a deep, technical look at why small-scale housing—like duplexes, triplexes, and modest apartment buildings up to 12 units—is so difficult to build under current conditions. Although recent Development Code changes increased residential flexibility, many practical barriers remain. This group brings together planners, local builders, engineers, housing advocates, and development professionals to identify those barriers and outline what the City can realistically address.

What "Missing Middle" Means for Charlottesville
"Missing middle housing" refers to neighborhood-scale residential buildings that fall between single-family homes and large apartment complexes. These modest buildings can offer more attainable housing options for a wider range of residents and broaden the types of homes available in the city. However, community experiences show that many projects face challenges—such as site constraints, utility requirements, complex permitting processes, unfamiliar development types, and financing hurdles—leading to fewer of these projects being built. The working group agreed on a practical definition: small residential buildings with up to 12 units, including duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and small apartment structures.

Purpose of the Working Group
Over the next year, the group will conduct a series of topic-focused meetings, site visits, and analysis sessions aimed at understanding the full landscape of obstacles. The work is not a policy rewrite—rather, it is a technical investigation designed to inform future decisions. The end product will be a report/memo delivered to City Council in Summer 2027 that identifies friction points, clarifies what issues can be resolved locally, and separates out challenges that are market-driven or controlled by state building rules.
The report will also help prospective developers and property owners understand common pitfalls and guide them toward better-informed planning.

Group Structure & Participation
The working group includes planners, architects, builders, engineers, and other development professionals. Members noted gaps in representation and agreed to invite additional experts for specific topics—such as engineering, multi-lot development, or building code considerations. Keeping the group small helps maintain focused discussion, while bringing in additional voices ensures that real-world challenges are accurately represented.

Topics the Group Will Explore

The group will organize meetings around key themes such as:

- *Fall - Utilities*
- *Fall - Engineering and Stormwater*
- *Fall - Site Visit*
- *Winter - Building & Fire*
- *Winter - Financing & Housing*
- *Winter - Development Review & Lot Assemblage*
- *Spring - Report-development sessions*
- *Spring - Public Open House at the end of the project*

Members also expressed interest in visiting both successful and unsuccessful projects—examples that illustrate what works, what doesn't, and why some sites ultimately stall despite appearing feasible at first glance.

Public Engagement & Transparency

Although the group's work is highly technical, public transparency is a core goal. Later in the process, the City will host public open houses to share findings and explain how different codes, standards, and constraints affect small-scale development. These events will cater to both experienced developers and everyday residents curious about what the City's current rules do—and don't—allow. A Connect Cville project page will also provide updates and ways for the community to stay engaged.

Why This Work Matters

Charlottesville has an official vision emphasizing housing diversity, affordability, and efficient use of land. But simply permitting denser housing on paper doesn't guarantee it will be built. Many projects struggle to achieve the maximum density theoretically allowed, and small developers often face high engineering costs, complex review processes, or uncertainty about feasibility. By identifying the biggest barriers, the working group aims to help City Council make informed choices—balancing neighborhood character, infrastructure needs, affordability goals, and the realities of the development market.

What Comes Next

The group will meet throughout the next several months and begin organizing information into a shared folder for reference. Staff will prepare summaries, and members will contribute additional examples and data as "homework" between meetings. This collaborative approach is intended to produce a clear, well-supported final report that can guide the City's next steps