Theme 3: Home & Neighborhood Choices

Preferences for different housing products and price points vary by community. Market conditions are influenced by consumer groups represented and the decisions they are making based on income, age, household size, and available financing. Historically, residential growth patterns in Garner favored suburban, greenfield development where buyers were willing to "move for value" to afford single-family homes on individual lots. More recently, residential growth within and in the vicinity of Garner has followed national trends toward higher density housing, which is emerging as either 1) standalone, suburban apartment complexes, 2) standalone townhome communities, or 3) a mix of housing types, some with a mix of for-sale and for-rent products, integrated within mixed-use, walkable environments.

Housing variety should expand over time to accommodate the demands of Garner's current and future residents. Retirees, empty nesters, and young professionals are among the segments of the population expected to drive real estate preferences in the next few decades. Young professionals, especially single and newly married, will continue to drive demand for rental and higher density housing products in more urban, walkable activity centers. Young professionals starting families may seek 'near-in' neighborhoods close to the downtown, or new activity centers identified in Chapter 2 that emphasize safety, schools, privacy, convenience, and more space, but are more walkable than some single-use, conventional Garner suburbs of the last several decades.

"Boomers" will be aging out of conventional single-family dwellings and looking for lower-maintenance housing products. Many may choose to live in multifamily housing (condominiums or apartments) in more walkable locations, which may offer greater independence in future years. Others may choose to 'down-size' into patio homes or townhouses, especially as they acquire second homes in other places. There is also a need for senior housing to allow and encourage seniors in Garner to age in place. These types include age-restricted and assisted living developments as well as accessory dwelling units where seniors can be close to family and caregivers.

Recognizing neighborhoods in the town's planning area as the "connective tissue" between activity centers is an important concept for the comprehensive plan. Neighborhoods provide a place for social interaction and foster connections between residents that create a source of pride and belonging in the community. Ideally, the predictable actions or routines of residents in a neighborhood contribute positively to the area's attractiveness and desirability. The sense of predictability created by repeated (positive) actions or routines in the neighborhood leads to the willingness of residents to stay, to put down roots, to keep the streets and parks clean, and to invest in private property.

Sometimes the most desirable neighborhoods in a community are influenced by the actions (and interactions) of the residents that live in them. Positive vibes in a neighborhood promote a place that is stable or on the rise, which significantly increases the interest and desirability for others to find a way into the neighborhood. Developers see this phenomena and create new neighborhoods that replicate the environment present for highly-desirable neighborhoods already in the community. It is critical that existing neighborhoods in Garner remain stable and desirable places for residents.

Residents also provide regular and loyal customers for nearby businesses and should be connected to them in meaningful ways. Physical connections may include new street connections or greenways that strengthen the relationship between origin and destination. Visual connections may include special paving treatments, street lighting, landscaping, or coordinated signage that reinforce a connection between homes and businesses. Social connections may include district names or special events held to present the activity center and nearby neighborhoods as a unified and desirable location.

The recommendations that follow under the topic of home and neighborhood choices provide clear targets and expectations for existing and future neighborhoods in the community, including the type, location, and price points of homes neighborhoods provide to existing and future residents.

Provide for greater home choices at different price points in the community.

Demographic diversity of people in terms of age, income level, culture, and race provides a sense of interest and vitality within the most loved places in the world. In order to attract this type of diversity to a community, the physical form must be conducive to the varied lifestyles of these groups. A key component of creating an environment where diversity thrives is the provision of a mix of housing options. Encouraging a variety of housing options also encourages variety in price points.

There should be many different types, sizes, and price points of homes intermingled in close proximity, with a range of living experiences from rural to more-dense, so that there is something for everyone, regardless of income level, lifestyle, or family size.

The variety of dwelling types in a community should include: different sizes of detached single family houses, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, townhouses, multifamily condominium and apartment buildings, and live/work buildings. In addition, accessory dwelling units with a living space (above the garage, for instance) should be permitted within the rear yard of each principal building for renters, extended family, tenants, or guests to stay or live.

Residential units should be available either for lease or for ownership. This allows young and old, singles and families, and residents having a range of income levels to find a dignified home that suits their preferences and lifestyles.

Neighborhoods in Garner should reflect the community's values and preferences toward housing mix, building quality, and neighborhoods amenities.

A neighborhood is more than just the homes within it. The most memorable neighborhoods people visit are well-thought out and designed with intended outcomes in mind. General design elements favored in Garner should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Homes should include architectural details that provide visual interest along the street, including façade treatments, front porches, roof eaves, roof pitches, and windows.

- The scale of homes and the spaces between them should convey a welcoming environment, including maximum fence heights and minimum materials, landscaping, or driveway placement.

- Similar home types and styles should face each other on a street, meaning transitions between home types should occur at the rear lot line or along an alleyway.

- A connected network of streets and sidewalks should serve the neighborhood. Cul-de-sacs should be limited to areas with environmental concerns or steep slopes.

- Street trees, and tree canopy over the street when trees are mature, should be the dominate feature for a neighborhood street.

- Garages, and especially garage doors, should be secondary in size, scale, and design as compared to the principle structure.

- Different types of open space should be included in a neighborhood, and located as a prominent feature (like a central green as the focal point and small neighborhoods parks in close proximity to residential blocks).

- Emphasis on neighborhood design that defines a center and edges to the neighborhood in terms of mixing home densities or housing types.

Specific rules, requirements, or standards to implement the list of general design elements for a neighborhood should be included in the town's Unified Development Ordinance.

Homes on small lots (opposite page), townhomes (above, left)) and condominiums (above, right) are among the unit types that seniors, empty-nesters, young professionals and many others are seeking. These and other products can be mixed in a single development to facilitate multi-generational neighborhood living as well as aging in place.

Spotlight on: Sense of Enclosure

Design professionals use the term "sense of enclosure" to describe the relationship between height and width for a defined space with the idea being that right-sizing the proportion of height to width in a space makes it more comfortable and inviting for visitors. Elements of height for a space may include buildings, trees, walls, or other permanent vertical features. Elements of width for a space may include streets, planting areas, plazas, outdoor seating areas, or other horizontal features that separate elements of height. Target ratios for instilling a sense of enclosure are expressed as the ratio of width to height. The ratio is measured using building-face-to-building-face distances on either side of the defined horizonal space.

Target ratios for sense of enclosure may vary by development intensity category— preserve, enhance, strengthen, or transform — and sometimes by general development category — residential neighborhood versus mixed-use area — within the same development intensity category. The Development Intensity Metrics Matrix in Chapter 2 identifies minimum building enclosure ratios for each of the development intensity categories.

In suburban areas, the placement of buildings, the relative sizes of each, and the presence of large surface parking lots in some locations may create broken lines in the landscape that dilute a sense of enclosure for the corridor or public space. Other vertical elements — especially trees — should be used in these conditions to span large gaps between buildings, including a planted center median to span very wide streets.

Town officials may also consider tree preservation buffers along specific roads in the planning area to help reinforce a sense enclosure for more rural or suburban landscapes.
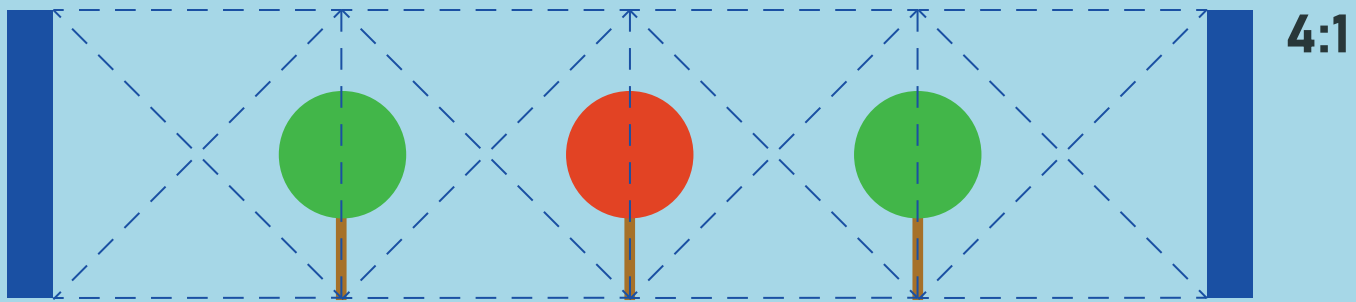
*Example of a sense of enclosure created by street trees.*
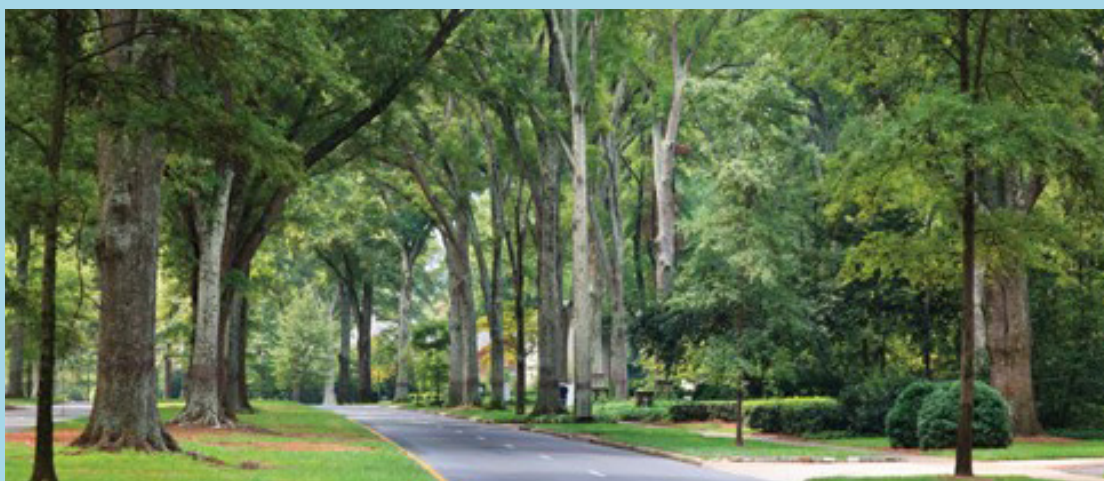
*Example of a sense of enclosure created by a continuous building face*

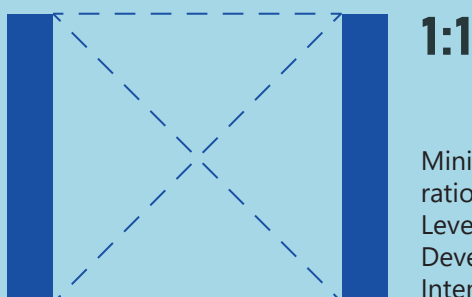## Spatial Definition by Width–to–Height Ratio:

4:1

Minimum building enclosure ratio recommended for Level 1 areas on the Development Change and Intensity Map (Chapter 2). In some areas, street trees (or other vertical elements) may be used to reduce the perceived sense-of-enclosure. Adding street trees in the green locations creates a 2:1 sense of enclosure for the street and a 1:1 sense of enclosure between the street and buildings. Adding street trees in the red location creates a 2:1 enclosure between the street and buildings. Adding street trees in both the green and red locations creates a 1:1 sense of enclosure for the street and the area between the street and buildings.


3:1
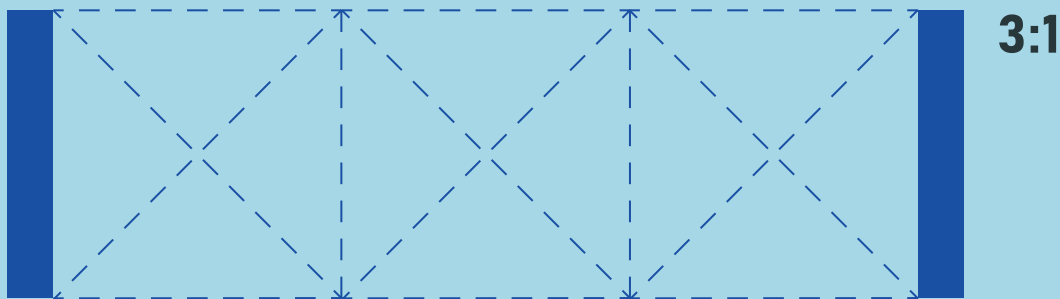
Minimum building enclosure ratio recommended for Levels 2 and 3 areas on the Development Change and Intensity Map (Chapter 2).

2:1
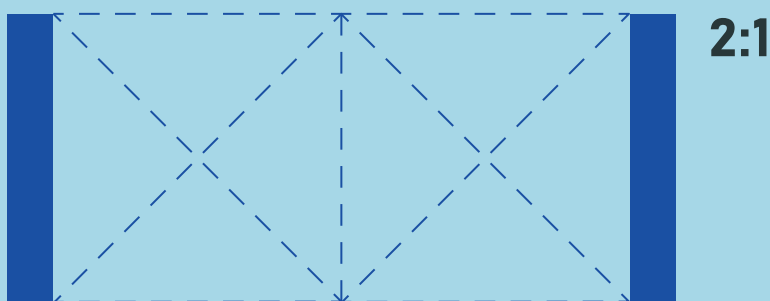
Minimum building enclosure ratio recommended for Levels 4A and 4B areas on the Development Change and Intensity Map (Chapter 2).

1:1
With building step back

1:1

Minimum building enclosure ratio recommended for Level 4C areas on the Development Change and Intensity Map (Chapter 2).
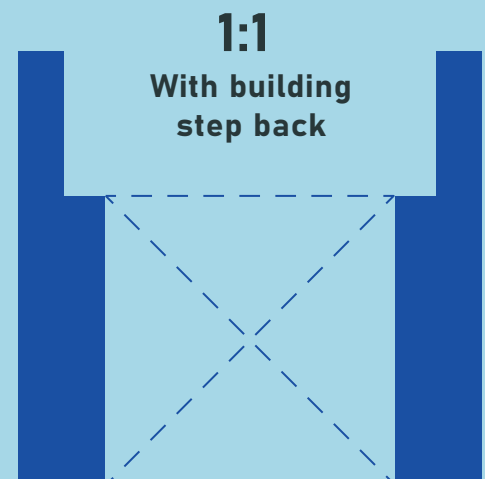
Buildings in Level 4C should consider a step-back condition in building height and massing away from the edge of a public space for any portion of the building over 40 feet tall to preserve the target building enclosure ratio.

Ensure Nearby Development Reinforces the Character and Quality of Existing Neighborhoods

The town should implement new rules and processes in its Unified Development Ordinance that provide higher-scrutiny for a development application that proposes infill development or redevelopment in, or adjacent to, an existing neighborhood. The purpose of new rules and processes should be to ensure new development in an existing neighborhood maintains a certain character that is consistent and complementary to the surrounding homes.

For implementation purposes, development of under-utilized and vacant land within, or adjacent to, an existing neighborhood should be the target of this policy. A small infill development or redevelopment project, sometimes as small as a single lot in an existing neighborhood, should adhere to stricter rules of compatibility with the surrounding environment since it is considered an incremental change to an already existing and defined neighborhood character. This does not mean a new land use should not be considered for an existing neighborhood in the future if the size, shape, height, and massing of the building, and its setbacks from property lines, can be made compatible with lots visible from the project location.

Larger development or redevelopment projects, sometimes representing the last tract of vacant land surrounded by one or more existing neighborhoods, should emphasize varying rules of compatibly for the site proportionate to the project size and visibility from adjacent neighborhoods. More strict rules of compatibility with the surrounding environment should be enforced where the project property abuts an existing neighborhood. More flexible rules of compatibility with the surrounding environment should be considered on a case-by-case basis for portions of the project further away from abutting neighborhoods.

Explore Ways to Consider Neighborhood Vulnerabilities, Including Displacement, When Evaluating Development Applications

Town staff should conduct research that identifies potential ways to consider vulnerabilities to neighborhood gentrification and displacement during the review of development applications in, or immediately adjacent to, existing neighborhoods. This research should include case studies and practices for how to provide an equitable distribution of the benefits associated with a development application for the neighborhood where the project is located.

Support neighborhood brand and identity initiatives, including unique entrance signs, street blade signs, landscaping, public art and painted crosswalks.

Neighborhoods are much more than homes and open space to the residents that live there. A neighborhood's successes or failures are often influenced by the people that live in the homes, and the connections people make to their neighborhoods or the routine activities they experience or associate with as "living life" in the neighborhood.

Existing neighborhoods in Garner should be recognized and celebrated for their unique characteristics. In some cases, this begins with a specific name chosen to represent the neighborhood. Unique entrance signs, street blade signs, landscaping, public art, or painted crosswalks should also be considered to reinforce a unique sense of place or brand identity for the neighborhood. Some improvements may be programmed and funded as town projects, but others should be accomplished organically by the residents of the neighborhood with support (or acknowledgment) from town officials.

Support initiatives or incentives in Garner to introduce accessory dwelling units in new or existing neighborhoods.

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) represent small, independent living units located on the same lot as a stand-alone single-family home. They are self-contained residences, and include a bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen. The units can be in the basement or attic of the single-family home; a ground-level addition to the single-family home; over a detached garage on the lot; or a standalone structure on the lot. Planning professionals sometimes refer to ADUs as "invisible density" because they are more easily hidden by the existing single-family home on the lot, they are spread out in a neighborhood so residents do not see a concentration of multiple units in a larger building; and they happen more organically over time as property owners decide to reinvest in their properties.

ADUs are presently allowed in the town's planning area subject to the rules and requirements in Section 6.12.3(B) or the unified development ordinance. Town officials should monitor residents' interest in building ADUs in the community and make adjustments to the ordinance, or provide incentives, if interest seems low in the years to come.
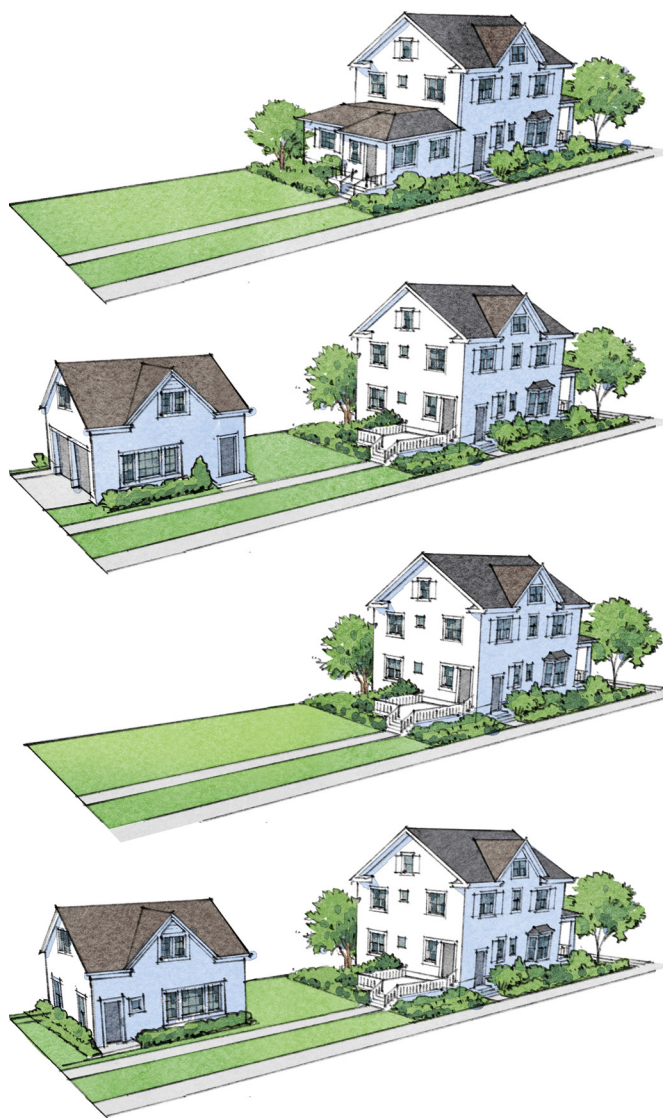
Find Partners to Join in Exploring Ways to Support More Local Workforce Housing

Collaborate with neighboring communities and agencies that are looking at workforce housing needs in the Triangle region. Demand for more homes means prices will continue to rise for both land and houses. Home costs in Garner are rising quickly and may preclude many would-be residents from moving into the community. While multi-dwelling development creates the quantity of housing that can address some home affordability issues, not all multi-dwelling housing should be in the form of large, apartment-style complexes. Small homes, townhomes, duplexes, cluster housing, row homes, and small condominium buildings should be a significant part of the product mix aimed at workforce housing.

Study Opportunities to Establish Affordable Housing Incentive Overlays

The 2017 Wake County Affordable Housing Plan recommends adoption of affordable housing incentive overlays (floating zones) in municipal zoning maps and ordinances to help provide more affordable housing units in the area. Alternative standards for development could serve to either increase the value that developers realize for a site — increased allowable densities — or reduce development costs like reduced parking requirements, expedited review processes, infrastructure cost-sharing, or tax rebates — as an incentive to build affordable housing in Garner.

Town officials should study the merits of affordable housing incentive overlays in Garner and determine if-when-how-where they might be best used to increase affordable housing supply in the community. Reasonable conclusions and recommendations from the study should guide revisions to the town's Unified Development Ordinance.
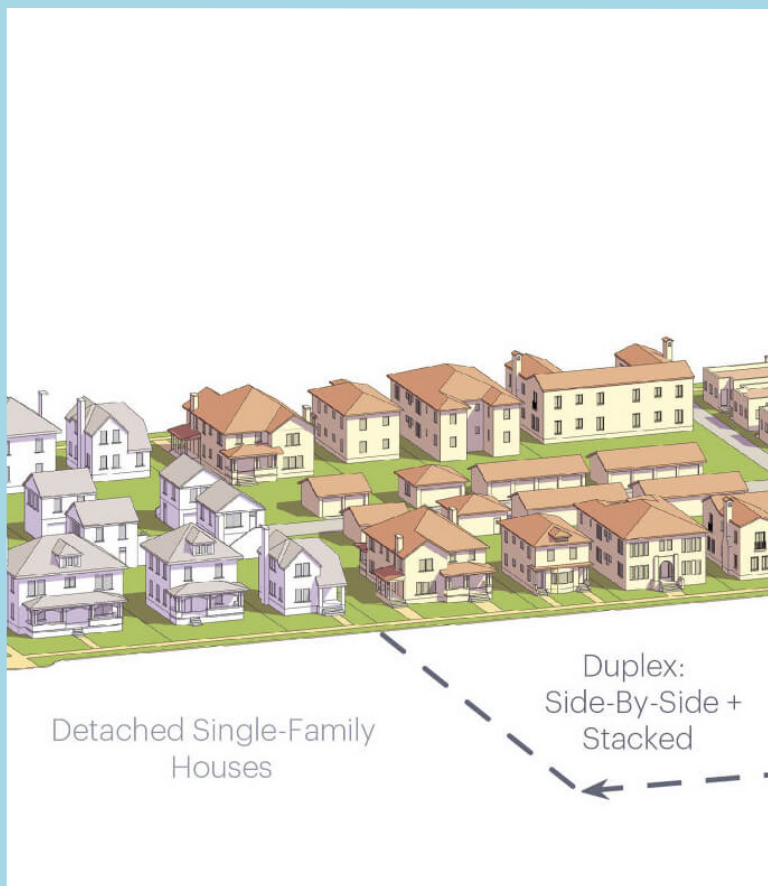
Spotlight on: Small-Format Multifamily Housing

Support initiatives or incentives in Garner to introduce "small-format multifamily" housing opportunities in new or existing neighborhoods.

Dynamic neighborhoods are places that provide exceptional quality of life, attainable and diverse housing options, and connections to neighborhood-serving uses like community gardens, parks, schools, retail areas, or employment areas. In some communities, these aspirations are captured in local initiatives to create or support "small format multifamily housing" options for residents. The term refers to a range of small- to medium-size home choices provided at different price points. The homes are compatible in scale and character to an existing surrounding neighborhood (infill development), or made part of the solutions identified to effectively transition between land uses and densities in a new activity center (development or redevelopment).

Small-format multifamily housing types are represented by single buildings with multiple units on a single lot, multiple buildings with multiple units on multiple lots, or a cluster of single- or multi-unit homes oriented toward a common green. Common home types in this category include duplex, triplex, quadplex, courtyard apartments, live-work units, cottage courtyards, townhomes, and small-scale apartments.
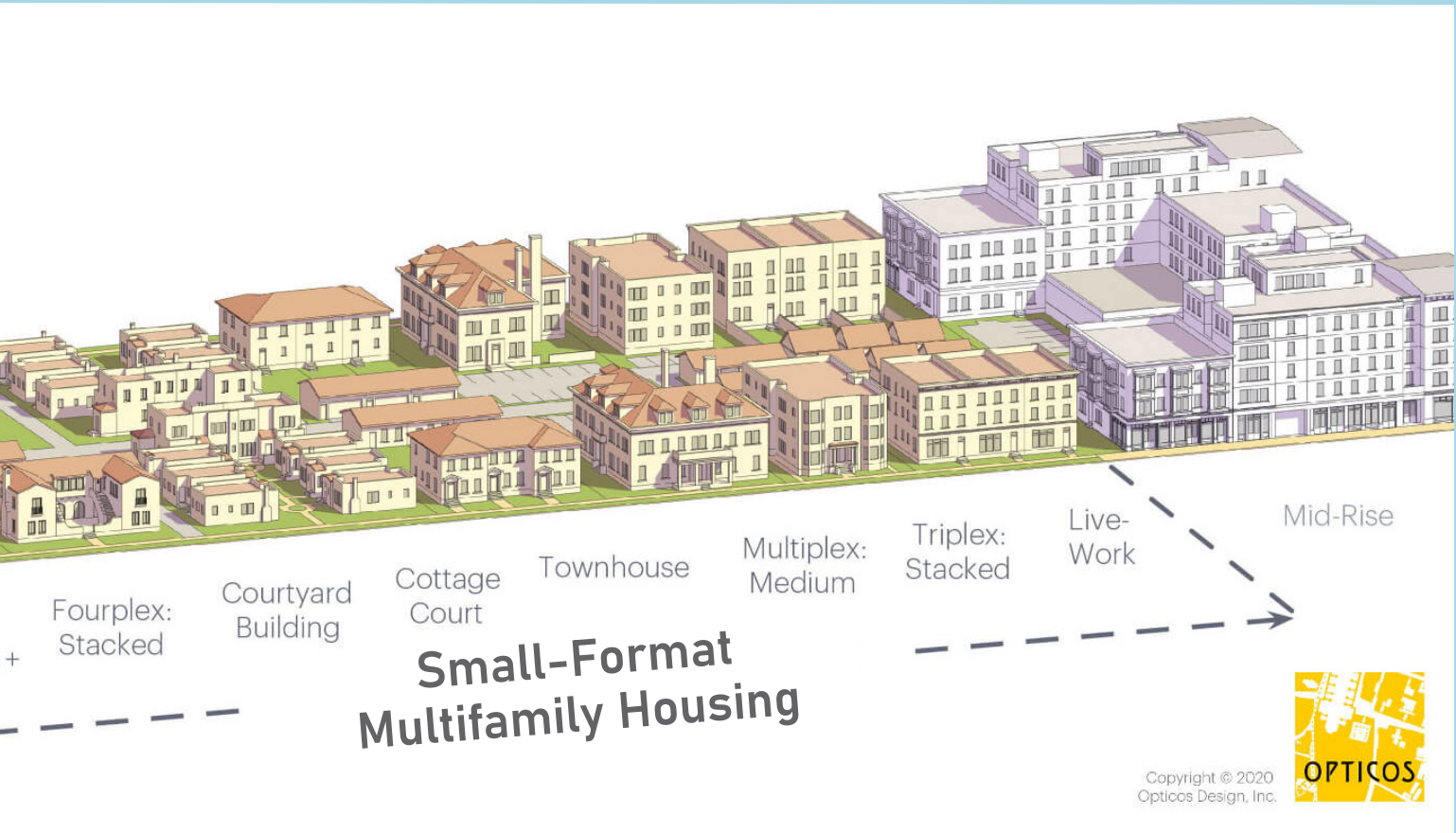
Small-format multifamily housing in Garner would increase home choices for both renters and owners, and provide more diverse home types in the community to foster socioeconomic diversity. The scale of small-format multifamily housing in the community would be a dramatic change compared to large-scale, stand-alone apartment complexes built in Garner over the last decade.

Town officials should create policies, ordinance, or incentives that advocate for small-format multifamily housing types in the community. Special considerations should be developed for infill development opportunities in existing neighborhoods, which are focused on 1) building architecture, orientation, and compatibility with adjacent homes; 2) potential issues with flooding associated with changed amounts of impervious surface; or 3) parking provisions to accommodate the target number of residents for the building.

Detached Single-Family Houses

Duplex: Side-By-Side + Stacked

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Fourplex:
Stacked

Courtyard
Building

Cottage
Court

Townhouse

Multiplex:
Medium

Triplex:
Stacked

Live-
Work

Mid-Rise

**Small–Format
Multifamily Housing**

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