

The term "Missing Middle" is not just for housing any more *SEASIDE* shows how Missing Middle commercial buildings are essential to a thriving community

By Mark Schnell



In the past in this column, I've talked about the need for "Missing Middle" housing: the townhouses, duplexes, and small apartment buildings that are rarely built in America these days. As a country, we tend to build either single-family detached houses or large apartment or condominium buildings (with large being more than 15 units or so). There's not much in between, hence the name Missing Middle (a term coined by Dan and Karen Parolek of Opticos Design).

Not everyone wants to live in these two very different housing types on the far ends of the spectrum, nor can everyone afford to live in them. Here's a statistic that I always find very relevant to these issues: only 22 percent of the households in the U.S. fit the "Leave it to Beaver" model of two parents and children under one roof. The rest of the households are single parents, empty nesters, childless couples, and singles. And the financial resources vary greatly within these groups. We need building types that work for all of these different people and financial situations.

If we simply examine the mix of building types in the best of America's older neighborhoods, we find much more than these two building types. The Missing Middle is mixed seamlessly into the urban fabric, often directly next door to single-family detached houses and larger apartment buildings. With all of the prohibitions and disincentives for building the Missing



Sundog Books demonstrates the value of Missing Middle commercial in a community. Starting in a plywood shack, the bookstore grew to require a larger building, now sitting in its current location on Central Square. Photo by Wendy O. Dixon

Middle, one would assume these buildings must have a negative impact on neighborhoods. But that's not remotely the case. The neighborhoods don't suffer from their presence. Rather, these Missing Middle buildings are an integral part of places that are beloved and often in very high demand.

And, in many places, the lack of housing options has created a shortage of affordable units, both rental and owner-occupied. Missing Middle housing could help make a dent in this problem in places where not currently allowed, but there are many disincentives to building these types of housing:

zoning, parking minimums, on-site stormwater detention, etc., to name just a few. And it's not only government regulations: even banks are not always prepared to loan money to build such housing.

In a recent blog post that was republished by Strong Towns, urban designer Kevin Klinkenberg noted that there is a lack of Missing Middle in commercial real estate that parallels the situation with residential real estate. It's a great point.

Many of the commercial buildings being constructed in our communities are also the most difficult and expensive to build. The retail sector is dominated by strip malls,

power centers, regional malls, and stand-alone corporate prototype buildings. All of these building types require a large amount of capital. It's not a game for the small developer, investor, or entrepreneur, and that's a problem for our society and economy. We need more ways for more people to participate in the creation of these places. And in the process, we'll create better communities with more successful entrepreneurs.

Where are the food trucks/carts, small retail pavilions, small commercial buildings, corner stores, live/work units, and small mixed-

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Court Care for Everyone

As a player, you can help maintain the court you love

By Tracy Townsend
Seaside Tennis Director
Owner, 30A Tennis

I often get compliments on our courts here in Seaside. In my opinion, without great courts, you cannot have a great program. I put a lot of time and effort into keeping my courts in the best shape possible. Everyone that walks on a tennis court can help keep the courts in shape. I see my clients helping all the time.



Tracy Townsend

The best way to pack a clay court down is to have tons of play. A thousand footsteps in tennis shoes act as a means of packing and leveling the court. We are lucky to have a robust program year-round, so we do get that help from our players in maintaining the courts. We also have a professional crew come in once every quarter to make sure enough material is down and to further pack the courts once this new material is added.

The edge of that same tennis shoe that packs the court can also damage it. Dragging a heel or the side of your shoe on the court can be fixed almost immediately with the bottom of your shoe. Just rake across the bad indentation with the

bottom of your shoe, and you can smooth out the court surface. This also helps you to not get a bad bounce should a ball hit in the same spot. It's like fixing a ball mark on a putting green where the golf ball landed and left an indentation. Repairing these marks immediately is not only good for the court and for the green, but it is a courtesy to all.

The shoe itself can be good or bad for the court. Flat-soled shoes are required for play on clay courts. Shoes that are not flat can tear up and scar the court and are also dangerous for your ankles. A ribbed bottom could catch on a line and stop sliding (as that type shoe was intended to do), injuring an ankle. Track or running shoes have uneven bottoms and can be elevated. These are probably the worst shoes on courts and on your ankles while playing tennis. Shoes are made for specific sports, and you should make sure, for safety's sake, that you have on the right shoe for the right sport.

I've only talked about our soft courts here in Seaside. But hard courts need proper care as well. Debris and leaves can become hazardous if left on any court. Wet courts are especially dangerous, whether hard or soft. Lines on both hard and soft courts are always more slippery than the playing surface.

The bottom line for all players is to help maintain any court you play on. Playing or teaching, I still



Dragging your shoe's heel or side can damage the court. Take care to rake across the indentation with the bottom of your shoe. Photos by Ellen Townsend

smooth out blemishes in the court. Think of the players coming on the court behind you and try to help them with their playing experience. I hope the players in front of you do the same. Pick up and remove a pebble or a stick. Walk the leaf of the court. If every player does this, you will always have a better court to play on. See you on the courts soon. 🌱

Tracy Townsend is a resort tennis expert and Director of Tennis at Seaside. You can reach him at tennis@seasidefl.com or call (850) 231-2214. For news, events and court conditions, find Seaside Tennis on Facebook [f](#).



A debris-free court is the best court. Do a courtesy to your fellow tennis players and pick up a leaf if you see one. Photos by Ellen Townsend

Winter Pro Shop Hours: Mon.-Thurs., 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Fri.-Sat., 9 a.m.-noon, Sun., 9-10:30 a.m.

Schedule: Eye Opener Clinics, Mon.-Thurs. 9-10 a.m. **Round Robins,** Fri.-Sun. 9-10:30 a.m.

Courts are open for play daily 8 a.m.-10 p.m. Call (850) 231-2214 to reserve courts, book lessons or sign-up for clinics and round robins. Find 30A Tennis and Seaside Tennis on Facebook for weather updates, news and events.

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use buildings? Just like with Missing Middle housing, they still exist in many of our best older neighborhoods, but they are rarely built today. A similar set of hurdles make building Missing Middle commercial difficult: zoning, parking minimums, on-site stormwater retention, and financing — again, to name just a few — but also some expensive code requirements. (While there's been growth in the food truck sector, and they operate within Seaside, they are still not allowed in many places, including most of the 30A corridor.)

The great urban thinker Jane Jacobs noted in her landmark book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" that smaller and older buildings are essential to the creation of start-up retail and restaurants. Due to the prohibitive cost, it's relatively rare for a "mom and pop" restaurant to build their own building from the ground up. Instead, they move into a smaller and/or older building that might have previously served as a restaurant, or one that can be easily and cheaply retrofitted. So if you value restaurants in your community beyond Applebee's and Red Lobster, you need some Missing Middle commercial spaces.

Thankfully, not all newer communities (those built in the last 40 years or so) have completely abandoned Missing Middle commercial. In fact, there is a stellar example here on Scenic Highway 30A: Seaside.

Seaside has a remarkable mix of commercial buildings and spaces. The first retail at Seaside was a Saturday market, with a few tents and vendors. This market moved



Originally built in Chattahoochee, Fla., this home was moved to Seaside and became what is now Great Southern Café in Seaside. Photo courtesy Deborah and Ian Ratowsky, original owners of the cottage

to a more solid home for a time beginning in 1983 with the market building that is now the Cabana boutique. Today the tradition of a market carries on in the Seaside Farmers Market, now much larger than the original incarnation and now located around the edge of the amphitheater.

Also at the start-up end of the incremental development spectrum are the restaurants housed in the row of Airstream trailers along 30A. And for many years, Seaside featured another building type for start-ups: the small retail pavilions around the perimeter of the amphitheater.

The buildings that are home to Great Southern Café, Shrimp Shack, and part of Bud & Alley's Waterfront Restaurant were all older buildings that were moved into place from outside of Seaside. (Jane Jacobs would be proud!)

The small retail buildings on the south side of 30A and the live/work units of Ruskin Place and Early Morning Hours are the next step up the ladder.

Although it was built as new construction, the simple building that houses Pickle's restaurant is an example of Missing Middle commercial. It's a place where you order at



Photo courtesy Great Southern Café

the window and then sit down in a covered outdoor dining area. What it lacks in air conditioning, it makes up for in beachy charm.

The other south side buildings offer relatively small spaces (although mostly conditioned), and they still act as retail and restaurant incubators, but they are appropriate for those businesses that have outgrown the Airstream trailers. Then, when a business achieves the next level of success, they might move to a larger, more permanent location in Central Square.

The large mixed-use buildings around the edge of Central Square are the final and highest level in this incremental scale. These buildings are more expensive to build and maintain. They are home to established businesses that need more space and would like to maintain roots in a given location. As Seaside reaches its next level of maturity as a place and a retail/restaurant destination, some of the smaller retail buildings may give way to these larger, more permanent buildings.

Seaside even has a corner store (although it's not technically on a corner): longtime favorite Modica Market.

Sundog Books might be the best example in Seaside of how this pro-

cess works. The longtime Seaside business started in a plywood shack south of 30A in 1986, then moved to the one-story building that is currently home to Amavida Coffee & Tea four years later. In 1998, they moved to their current home: a two-story building on Central Square that they share with Central Square Records. It's a success story that's only possible with Seaside's Missing Middle commercial. It's certainly been a win-win-win situation: Seaside has a longtime tenant, the business owners thrive, and our community enjoys a fantastic independent bookstore.

What is your town's version of Sundog Books? And what is your community doing to make sure the next generation will have buildings that allow independent local businesses to grow? 🌱

Mark Schnell is an urban designer based in Seagrave Beach. Among his most prominent projects are three New Urban beach communities on the Texas coast: Cinnamon Shore, Palmilla Beach, and Sunflower Beach.

Learn more about his firm
Schnell Urban Design at
SchnellUrbanDesign.com.