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The Curious Case of Missing-Middle Housing

This year's housing starts are almost keeping pace with last year. According to CMHC, there were 1,480 new homes from January to May compared to 1,525 homes in 2021.

However, the vast majority of starts are apartments and condos representing 976 units.

Small multi-family housing for young families continues to be missing in many municipalities.

Year-to-date, there has been zero construction of missing-middle housing (duplexes, townhomes) in many municipalities.

These municipalities include Central Saanich, View Royal, Saanich, Oak Bay, North Saanich, Metchosin, and Highlands.

New missing middle housing can be found in Langford – 100 units; Sooke – 37; Victoria – 26; Colwood – 22; Esquimalt -12; Sidney – 10; Juan De Fuca (RDA) – 2.

However, they represent only 209 new homes out of 1,480 units or 14%.

The biggest challenge is ongoing new regulations, processes and costs imposed by municipalities.

While municipalities claim they want to encourage more missing middle housing, their regulations and fees indicate the opposite.

The development approval process and costs for a small subdivision are similar to a large multi-family project, so municipalities actually discourage small projects suitable for families.

The principle of economy of scale dictates costs are better accommodated by large multi-family developments, so this encourages larger projects.

Another example is Victoria's new deconstruction bylaw targeting only single family homes and duplexes. Based on economy of scale, these projects are least able to absorb the added costs.

Large multi-family projects are exempt for now, which defies logic. Victoria council claims to encourage missing-middle housing, and then discourages the homes by adding new costs.

These regulatory challenges frustrate builders and undermine affordability for a large demographic of millennials starting families.

The public can encourage missing-middle housing and affordability by bringing these issues to candidates during the upcoming municipal elections on October 15th.



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