

# The Local Lever:

## Local Tools for a Abundant Housing Future

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GICH April 2025 Spring Retreat



# About Us

The MicroLife Institute is a **mission-driven**, 501(c)3 **not-for-profit housing advocate and developer**

headquartered in Clarkston, GA. We **build stronger communities** through **housing development projects** and **education** to elevate awareness of the need to increase housing options to meet 21st century demographics and housing needs.

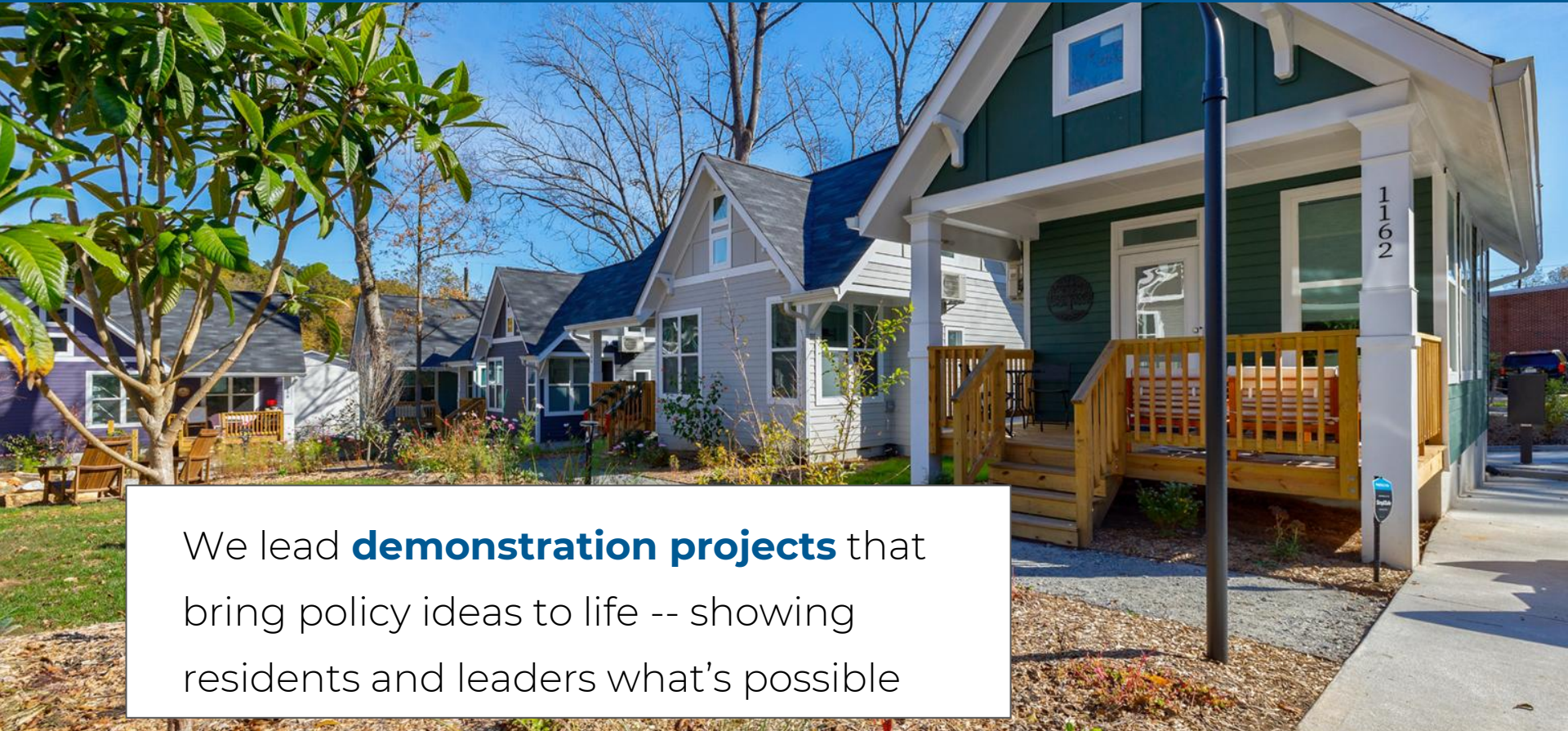


# What Do We Do?

We help communities **rethink zoning and land use policy** to create more “right-sized” homes in desirable locations



# What Do We Do?



We lead **demonstration projects** that bring policy ideas to life -- showing residents and leaders what's possible

# What is “Housing Choice?”



# Missing Middle Housing



- **Middle of the spectrum** between large single-family and mid- to high-rise multifamily

- **“Missing”** after being **prohibited by zoning** in many places; **illegal or difficult to build today**

# Why Zoning Matters

Zoning shapes what can be built  
*(and what can't)*



# The Affordability Case for Building More Homes on Smaller Parcels

- Boosts overall housing supply
- Smaller homes = lower costs
- Shared land + infrastructure = savings
- Matches modern household needs
- Walkable living saves money & adds value





# Case Studies

Real Examples. Real Momentum.

# Decatur, GA: Legalizing Gentle Density

- **Zoning update aimed to expand housing options while maintaining neighborhood character.**
- **Duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes now allowed in all single-family zones** (Applies to R-50, R-60, R-85, and RS-17 districts.)
- Units must meet existing single-family size limits.
- 1 parking space per unit (some on-street allowed)
- Quadplex + ADU allowed (Inclusionary zoning)
- Permit cap (3 per school zone) during 18-month rollout period



600 Commerce Drive:

# **Decatur Missing Middle Community Engagement & Development**



# MMH Safari: Housing in its Natural Habitat



# Design Charette: Listening to the Community



# What We Heard

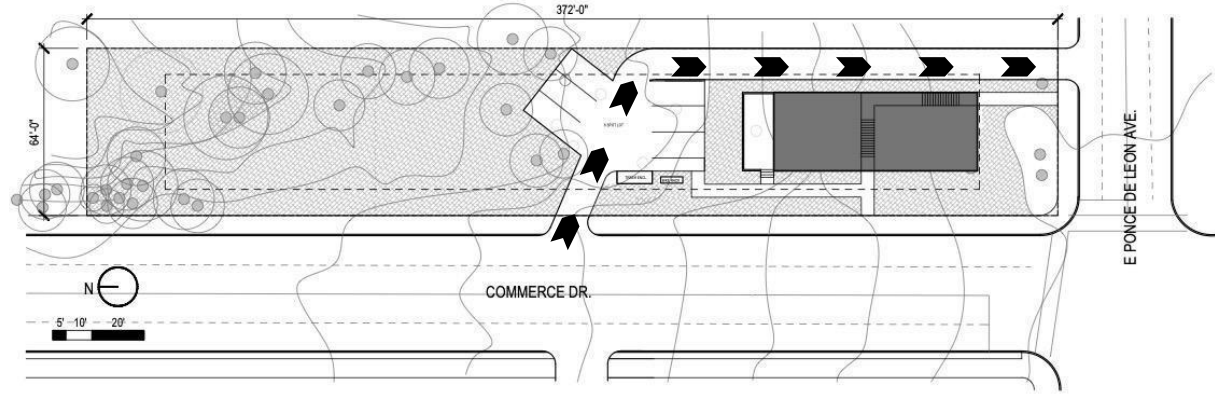
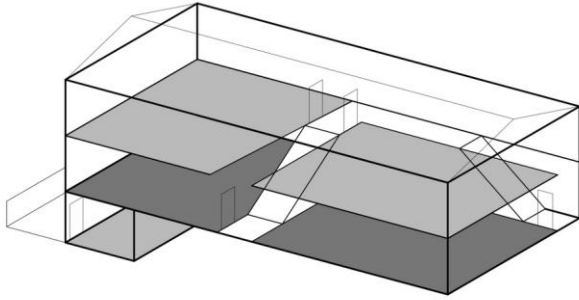
- Match neighborhood scale and style
- Prioritize building where existing home sits
- Max out unit count within new zoning regs
- Address traffic, parking, and pedestrian safety
- Manage on-site stormwater runoff
- Use Universal Design for aging in place

# Design Review

Synthesis, options and discussions of  
what's possible

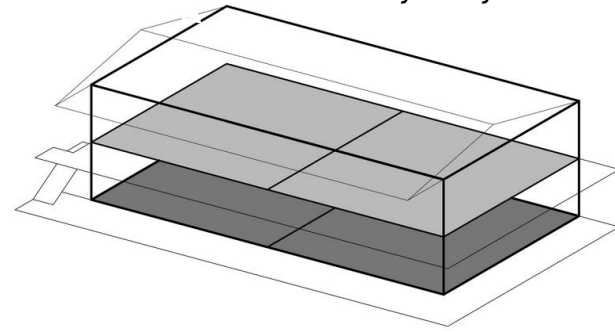
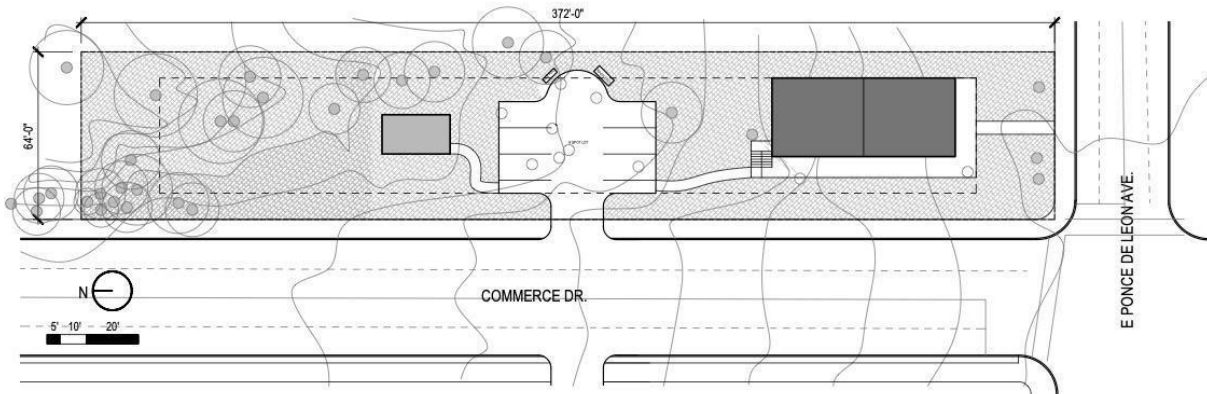
## Option A

“2 entry” 4plex w/ attached ADU  
One way entry/exit



## Option B

“4 entry” 4plex w/ Cottage ADU  
Two way entry/exit



# Proposed Site Plan

4plex + Attached ADU  
1 way in/out w/ parking



# The consensus: Quadplex + Attached ADU



# Lessons from Decatur's Zoning Update

- **Pair zoning changes with scale controls**  
(e.g., building size limits to preserve neighborhood feel)
- **Engage the community early and often**  
(build trust, reduce fear)
- **Show what's possible**  
(a proof-of-concept helps residents visualize the change)





# DeKalb County

Enabling “By-Right” Cottage Court Development.

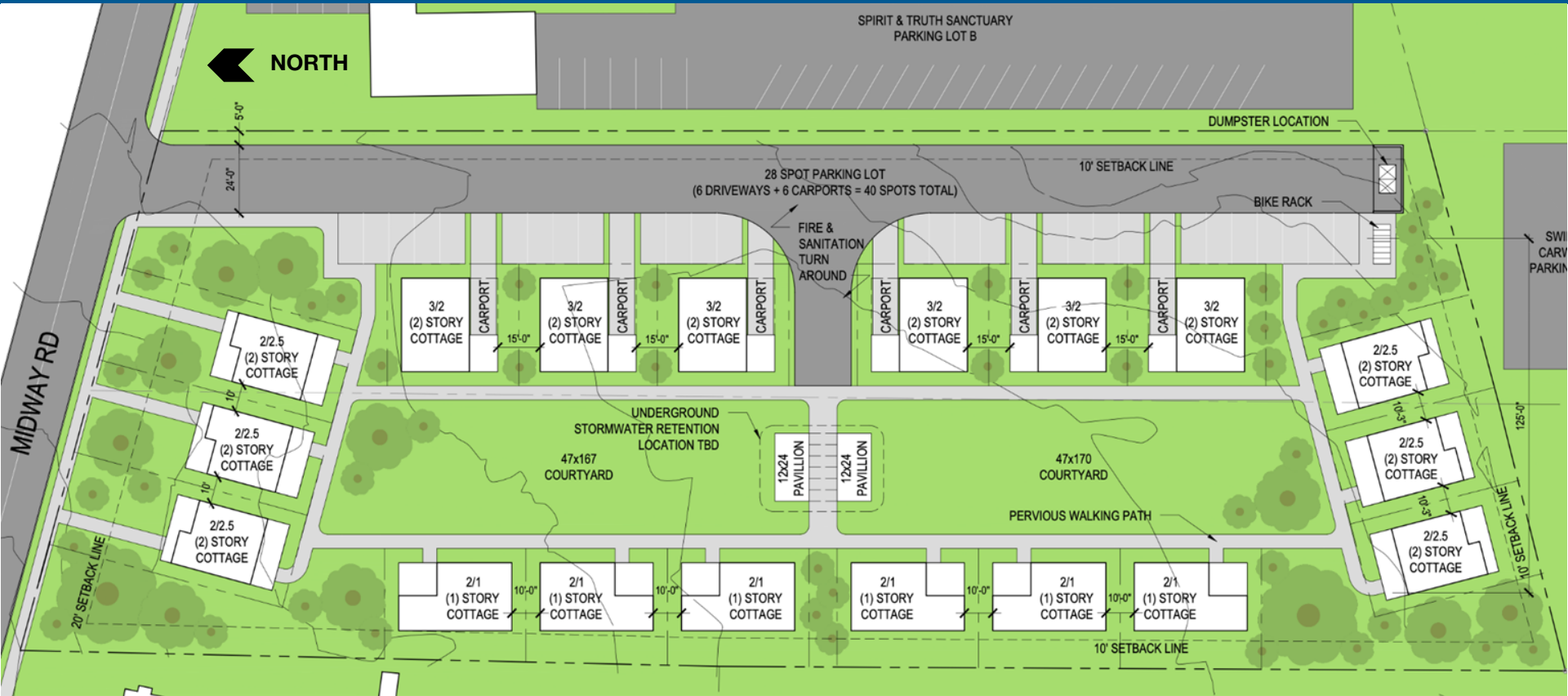
# DeKalb County: Zoning for Missing Middle Housing

- Hybrid zoning code (adopted 2015)
- R-60 zoning allows cottage courts by right
- Medium-density zones allow MMH development
- Dimensional flexibility



# Proof of Concept: Midway Cottages

18 Units- mix of 2/1, 2/2.5, 3/2, shared courtyard spaces, grouped parking





# Lessons from DeKalb County's Zoning Update

- Set a clear vision, then align the code.
- Zoning tables matter.
- It works — but it still takes rezoning.
- Next step: expand by-right zones.





# Clarkston

Pairing Policy Change with Proof-of-Concept.



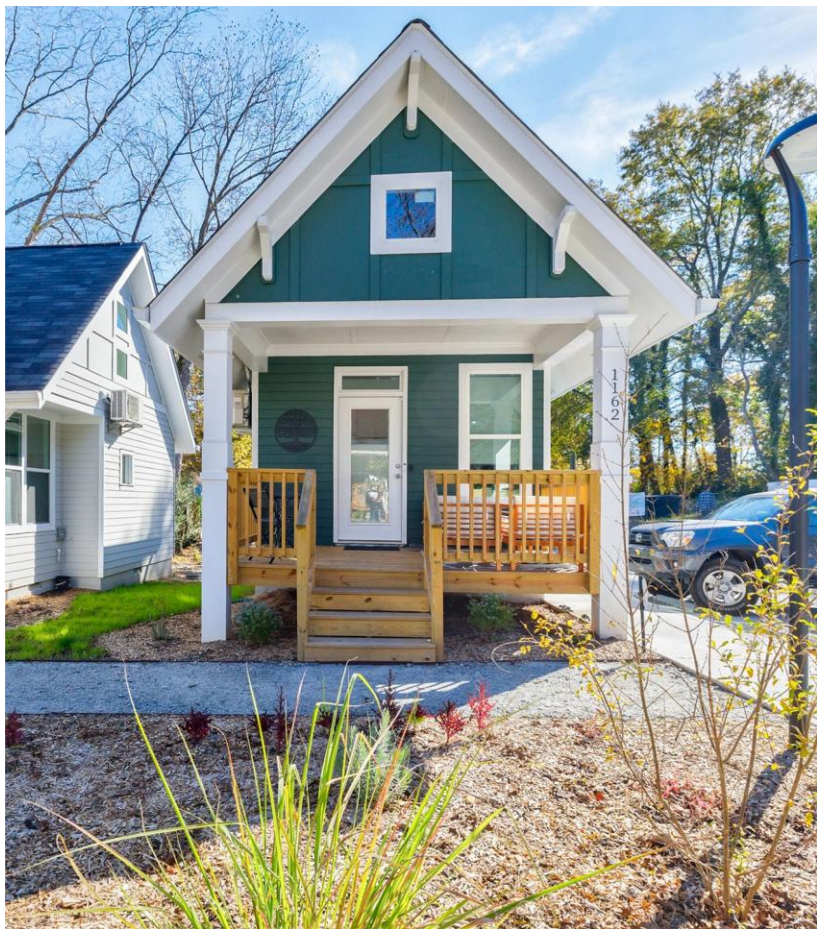
# The Cottages on Vaughan

MODEL PROJECT IN CLARKSTON, GA  
HOUSING & EDUCATIONAL TOUR SITE

# Clarkston, GA: A Pilot Project Takes Root

- In 2016, then-Mayor Ted Terry connected with MicroLife at a Tiny House Festival.
- MicroLife helped refine the cottage court ordinance to allow for reductions in lot sizes and other dimensional standards. Passed in March 2018.
- City leaders supported MicroLife's first pilot project near downtown.
- Cottages on Vaughan: 8 small homes on ½ acre, completed in June 2021.
- 1500-person interest list





# Pocket Neighborhoods: Community-Centered Design



## Cottages Grouped Around Commons

GATHERING SPACES & ATTRACTIVE  
LANDSCAPING



## Walking Paths & Green Spaces

LANDSCAPED BEAUTY TO CONNECT THE  
COMMUNITY WITH NATURE



## Balancing Public & Private Realm

GRADIENT OF PRIVACY, ENSURING  
EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN SPACE



## Clustered Parking

TO ENCOURAGE WALKING &  
ACCESSIBILITY



## Sustainable Design

BUILT TO LAST & ENERGY EFFICIENT



## Friendly Porches

FACILITATING COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS



## Flexible Amenity Areas

FOR RESIDENTS TO CHOOSE & PROGRAM





# Lessons from Clarkston

- **Strong local leadership** drives change
- **Ordinance updates take time** (e.g. 9 months) and require **effective community engagement**
- **Policy** can come **before or after** a pilot project
- **Cities can partner effectively** with **small developers**
- **Community engagement** may be more effective if led by a **non-government partner**
- **Collaborate on affordability** at the end—**don't mandate it upfront**



# The Case for Cottage Courts in Zoning Reform

**Neighborhood-Scale Design**

**Gentle Density**

**Builds Trust with Residents**

**Statewide Momentum**



# Practical Zoning Tweaks

**Reduce or eliminate** house size and lot size minimums, off-street parking requirements

**Legalize ADUs**

**Enable cottage courts by right** in all single-family zones.



# Land Use Policy & Zoning Changes That Unlock More Housing

*Map where missing middle housing (MMH) fits.*

*You don't need to rewrite the whole code.*

*Make policies “politically resilient.”*

*Avoid discretionary approvals.*

*Streamline by-right development process.*

*Invest in infrastructure where you want housing.*

# 3 Ideas to Take Home

**Know what housing you want — and  
set the zoning table to match it.**

**Look for allies inside your local  
government.**

**You're not alone — there are  
resources to help.**

