Filling in the middle

Background and goals
In most of America, the growth in housing supply is happening in two locations. Single family houses continue to be built on greenfields at the edge of metropolitan areas (as they have for the past 70 years), and more recent urban revitalization has created a boom in large scale multi-unit buildings in the downtown cores. The areas between these two zones - the neighborhoods of predominantly single family houses built over the past century - have seen relatively little change, and provide the largest supply of land which could be used for new housing construction. As the environmental, social and economic costs of sprawl have become more clear, a movement has sprung up to reconsider "missing middle" housing - the small-scale, multi-family housing types which were usually built in these neighborhoods, and which met the needs of a wide range of household types in the pre-war era, but which were often rendered illegal afterwards.

The State of Oregon is leading the way on this approach: the legislature passed HB2001 in 2019, allowing up to four dwelling units can on any residential lot in a city. This law went into effect in July, 2002, and Eugene has adopted changes to its zoning ordinance to implement the law. While opponents of this law predicted that whole neighborhoods of bungalows would wiped clean by greedy developers throwing up shoddy fourplexes, the opposite result is more likely: it may be that nothing substantive will happen. Just because something is legal doesn’t mean it is easy to accomplish, and there are many impediments to this approach. Construction costs are very high, and small property owners often don’t have the expertise to undertake the development process – with the complexities of design, finance and regulation.

To help jump-start this process, an introductory webinar by the Incremental Development Alliance was sponsored by the City of Eugene and Better Housing Together, which drew over 200 participants – mostly homeowners who were interested in developing housing on their properties. This studio will work with some of those property owners as clients, to develop designs and work through all the development processes to achieve critical goals, including:
- Increase the supply of housing in Eugene, an incredibly tight housing market
- Provide more diversity in housing types, to meet the needs of households (seniors, singles, non-nuclear families) who are often neglected in the current market
- Make housing more affordable, through smaller units, lower land costs per unit, and decreased operating costs
- Decrease environmental impacts and carbon footprints through infill in pre-existing, close-in neighborhoods
- Improve a sense of community, both for the new projects, and the neighborhood as a whole.

Methodology
- Each student will work with a real client throughout the term, someone who has an actual site on which they’d like to build more housing.
- The studio will be highly structured, with presentations (preceding related design studies) on relevant issues, such as housing typology, real estate development, finance, demographics and needs of the local housing market, site design, zoning, construction, building codes, etc.
- Each student will develop the program with their client, then look at a range of options for the site, including incorporating and remodelling existing buildings or going with all-new construction.
- The final project will need to integrate design, planning, legal and financial criteria - providing a "proof-of-concept proposal - one which fulfills the studio’s goals, while meeting the needs of the client.

Notes
- There will be some field trips during studio time to look at local housing precedents, and to visit sites.
- In addition to working with clients, we expect that there will be interaction with and input from city officials and planners, local architects and developers, and outside consultants.