

Filling in the blanks

If you pay attention to the Urban Mayhem Project page on Facebook, you know that I love to share articles about the creative ways cities are implementing good planning and design. (You don't read the Facebook page? Get on your computer and "like" it this instant!)

After attending an enormous number of meetings, paying really close attention to what's going on in Rutland and meeting lots of outstanding people, I feel that the greatest issue keeping Rutland from going all the way is housing. But not just any housing: affordable housing that's appropriate for young professionals. While there are many houses in Rutland that are affordable to buy, most are not affordable to own. And most are not practical for a single person who's just starting out (or a person of any age who simply wants to live alone).

"I won't move to Rutland because of the lack of green space," said no one ever. No one has ever

decided not to move to Rutland because of the condition of the roads either. They don't move here because they can't afford to live here. (Or they live here but with their parents, which isn't a very glamorous way to spend your 20s).



Elsie GILMORE
Rutland upRising

So, what can we do to solve this very pressing problem? Well, the first step to solving your problem is admitting you have one. OK, what next? For starters, let's talk about urban infill. "What is urban infill?" you ask. Great question!

Urban infill, as it relates to housing, involves taking smaller structures and sticking them into open places to create more housing. This can involve splitting big lots, allowing for additional structures on lots (think: mother-in-law cottage) and generally allowing for more density without building giant apartment buildings. I've included a photo taken in Rutland showing a nice big gap between two houses as



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This photo taken in Rutland shows a big gap between two houses as an example of where infill could possibly take place.

an example of where this infill could possibly take place.

There has been talk of razing some of the blighted properties in Rutland, and this would be a great opportunity to address Rutland's housing needs using urban infill. Some have wondered where people will live without all those apartments that might be lost. The answer is that a) there will still be plenty of apartments and b) wouldn't it be nice if young professionals could own a home instead of just renting? Building smaller, newer homes would allow for good density while giving those young creatives we

would like to lure to Rutland an inspiring place to live and a way to invest in Rutland without breaking their budget. There is a big difference between being able to live in Rutland and being able to thrive here.

Jon Geeting, a policy researcher from Pennsylvania recently wrote that "bringing down housing and transportation costs to an affordable level is by far the best way to raise city living standards." I couldn't agree more. While many people spend upwards of 50 percent or more of their monthly gross income on housing, Geeting and others think the goal should be for a person's

combined housing and transportation costs to be no more than 40 percent of area median income. In Rutland County this is about \$26,000 per year or roughly \$2,200 per month. Forty percent of that would be \$880 per month. Geeting suggests that housing and transportation costs are tightly linked, and this is especially true in Vermont where your job might be very far away from your home.

Urban infill generally involves a change in zoning that allows for smaller lots and different home sizes and configurations. It's a great opportunity for a creative developer to make great use of space and design.

Micro-neighborhoods can be created that consist of small houses with shared space and/or facilities. The possibilities are endless.

This is an issue of importance for real estate professionals, the City of Rutland, the Rutland Redevelopment Authority, developers, local businesses — anyone interested in bringing more high quality residents to the City of Rutland. I encourage lively discussions about this issue. Ready, set, go!

Elsie Gilmore is the founder of Urban Mayhem Project, the catalyst for the Rutland Uprising campaign (www.urbanmayhemproject.com)