

# AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME (AGAIN)

## TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS IN DECATUR HISTORY

Historically, traditional neighborhoods have featured housing types beyond just single family homes – duplexes, triplexes and quads, for example. These are types we now call the “missing middle” and there’s evidence of them all over town if you take the time to look.

It wasn’t by accident. Such types evolved organically to accommodate people of different incomes and circumstances or at different stages of life. They’ve been a fundamental characteristic of neighborhoods worldwide for centuries.

## OUTLAWING TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS IN DECATUR

That all changed in Decatur in 1988 when they were outlawed in response to challenges we now, in our booming real estate market, find quite unfamiliar – disinvestment and absentee ownership.

## A MORE INCLUSIVE FUTURE

Today, our desire for a more inclusive and diverse city exists in stark contrast to the challenges of the 1980s. What was once a seemingly practical response to decline now exists as an artificial economic barrier – a new form of redlining that prevents all but the highest income households from living in Decatur’s neighborhoods.

The city’s Affordable Housing Task Force report adopted in February of 2020 recommended we re-allow these housing types that once played such an important role in the diversity of Decatur’s neighborhood life.

***At the direction of the City Commission, we’re now working to implement this recommendation and are seeking your help.***



Image credit: Opticos Design

## WHAT IS MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING?

Missing middle housing refers to neighborhood buildings that feature multiple units – like a duplex, triplex, or quad – or different living arrangements like an accessory dwelling unit, allowing for a more diverse array of neighbors with a wider scope of incomes and life circumstances. Two criteria make these missing middle units successful: When they’re compatible in size to neighboring single family homes, and when they’re mixed into the fabric of the street rather than isolated in distinct areas.



## HOW DOES IT WORK IN PRACTICE?

Decatur residents need not take a leap of faith that missing middle can work. Historic examples of it are all around us, quietly and efficiently providing housing diversity at the neighborhood level. Some are former single family homes that have been converted. Others were built as is. Either way, they provide the proof we need that missing middle works. And can work again.

# A HOUSE IS A HOUSE

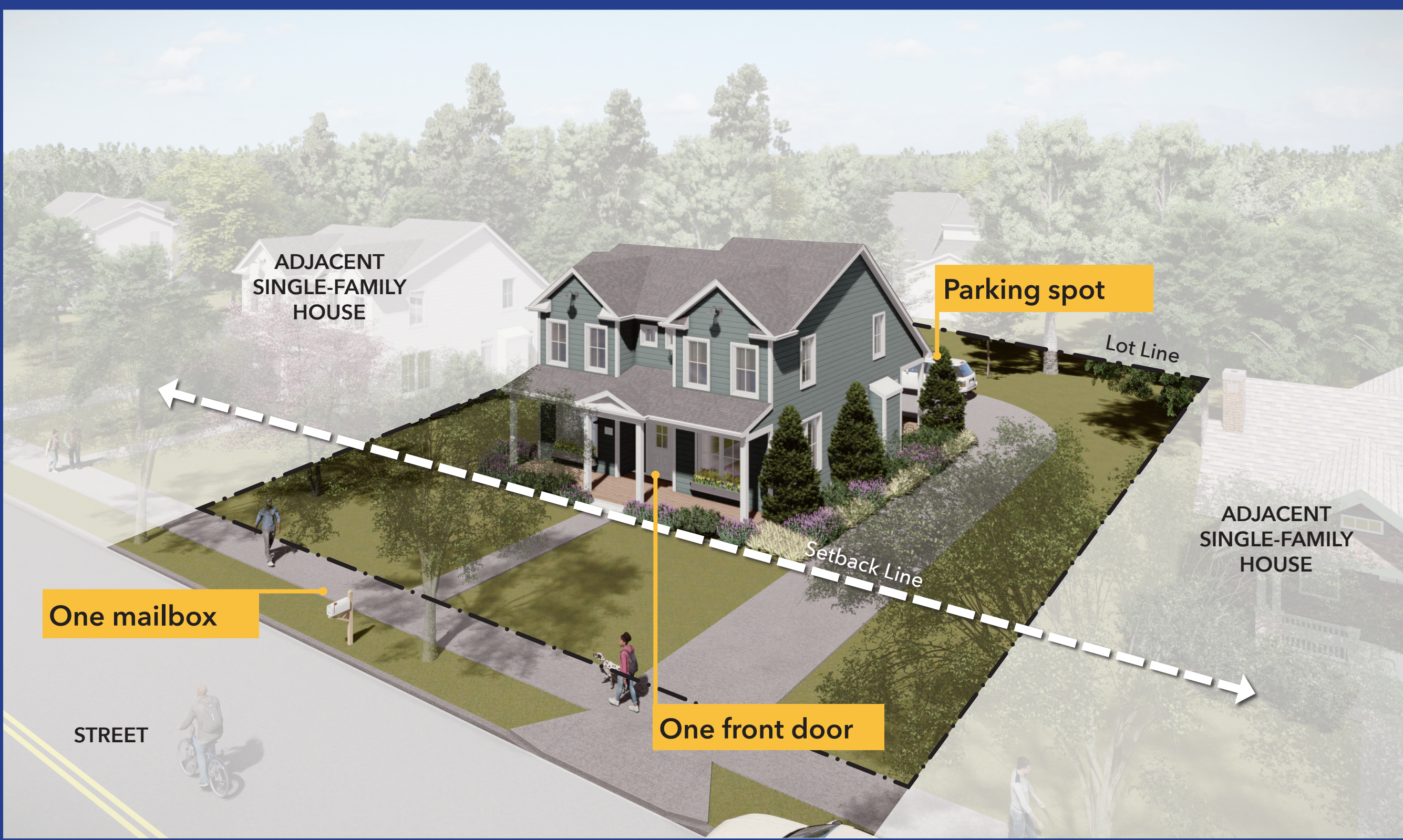
(but what happens on the inside makes all the difference)



We know what to expect when it comes to new home construction in Decatur. We consider "character" in terms of style, massing and orientation – all the things that affect the look and feel of the neighborhood. And that's what makes the prospect of missing middle housing so exciting: We can literally become a more inclusive community with buildings sized and styled just like single family homes.

## SINGLE FAMILY HOUSE UP TO A QUADPLEX IN THE SAME HOUSE SIZE & ON THE SAME LOT

SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSE



3,500 SF

typical new single-family house in Decatur

9,000 SF

typical Decatur lot size shown

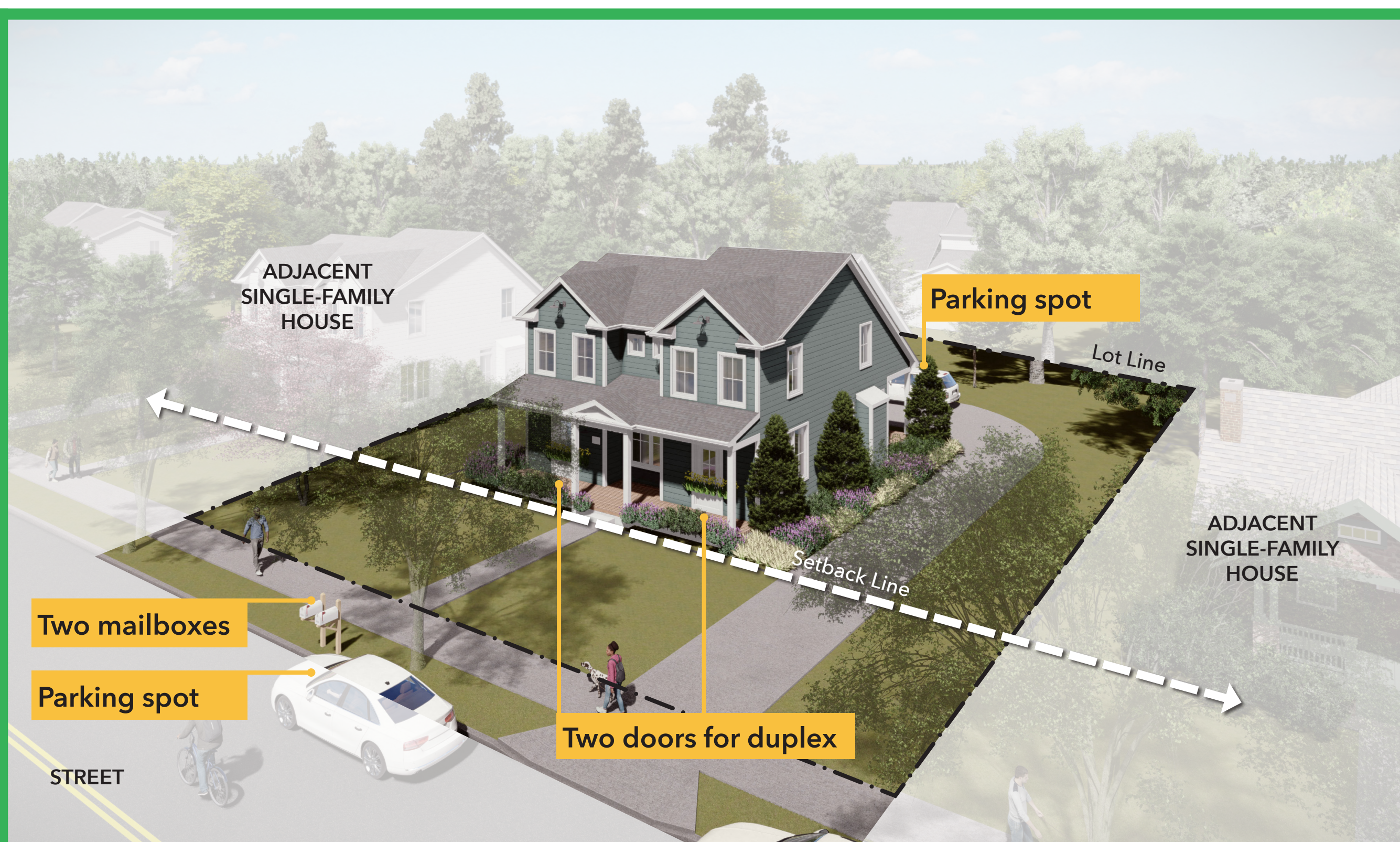
PARKING

1 space required, but most have more than one car

5 BEDROOMS + 3.5 BATHS\*

\*House shown illustrates a typical neighborhood condition and reflects Decatur's residential FAR of .40. Larger lots allow for larger houses, smaller lots mandate smaller houses.

DUPLEX



A comparably sized and styled building configured as a duplex

2 UNITS

2 bedrooms + 2 bathrooms each

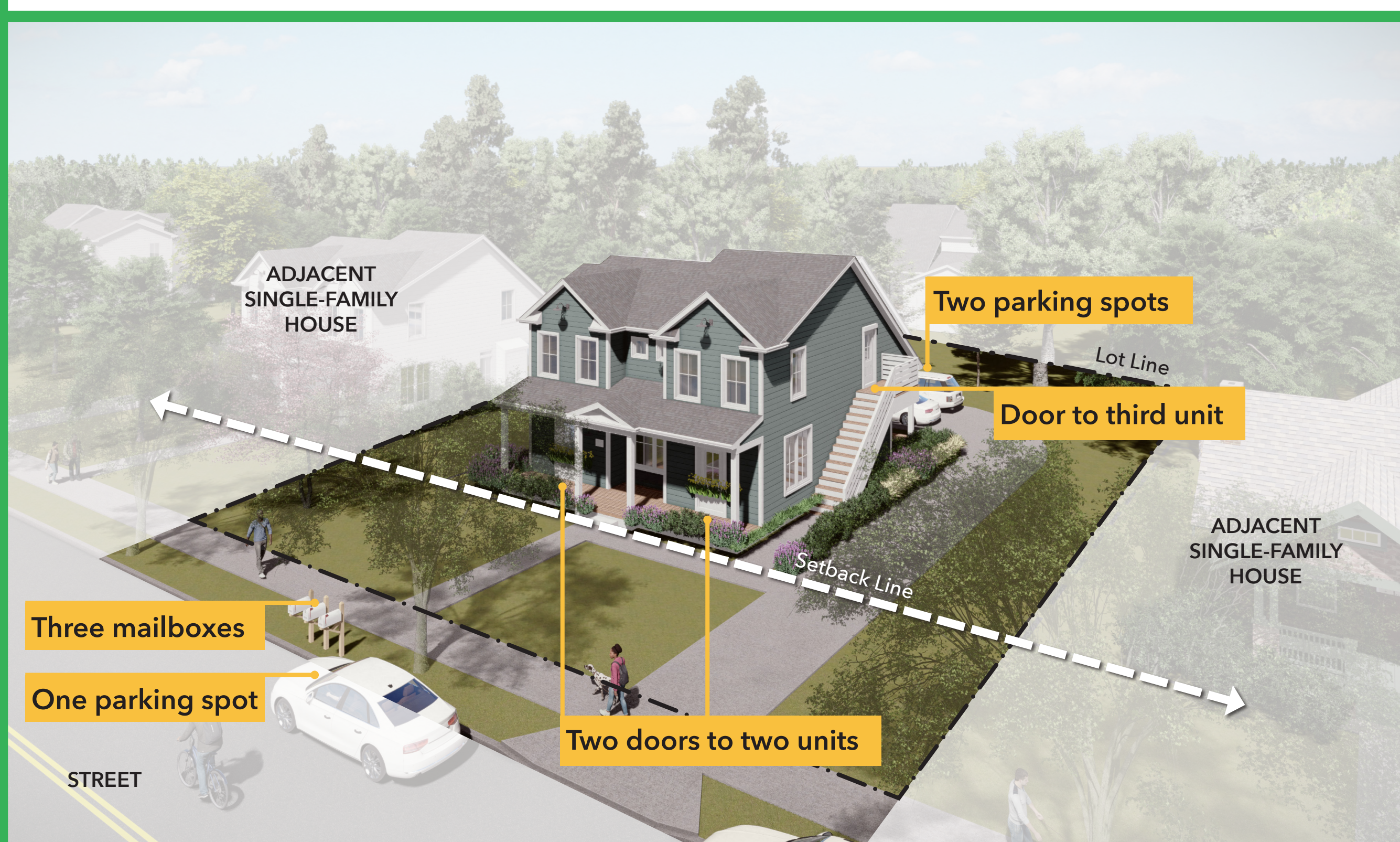
PARKING

2 spaces required - one can be on the street

### A GREEN APPROACH TO PARKING

As proposed, missing middle housing in Decatur will be held to the same parking requirements as other housing types (1 space per dwelling) but under certain conditions will be permitted to satisfy up to 50% of that requirement with adjacent on-street parking. This environmentally-driven provision ensures that parking takes advantage of existing infrastructure and doesn't undermine the goals of the city's stormwater and tree ordinances.

TRIPLEX



A comparably sized and styled building configured as a triplex

3 UNITS

One 2-bedroom, 1.5 bath unit  
Two 1-bedroom, 1 bath units

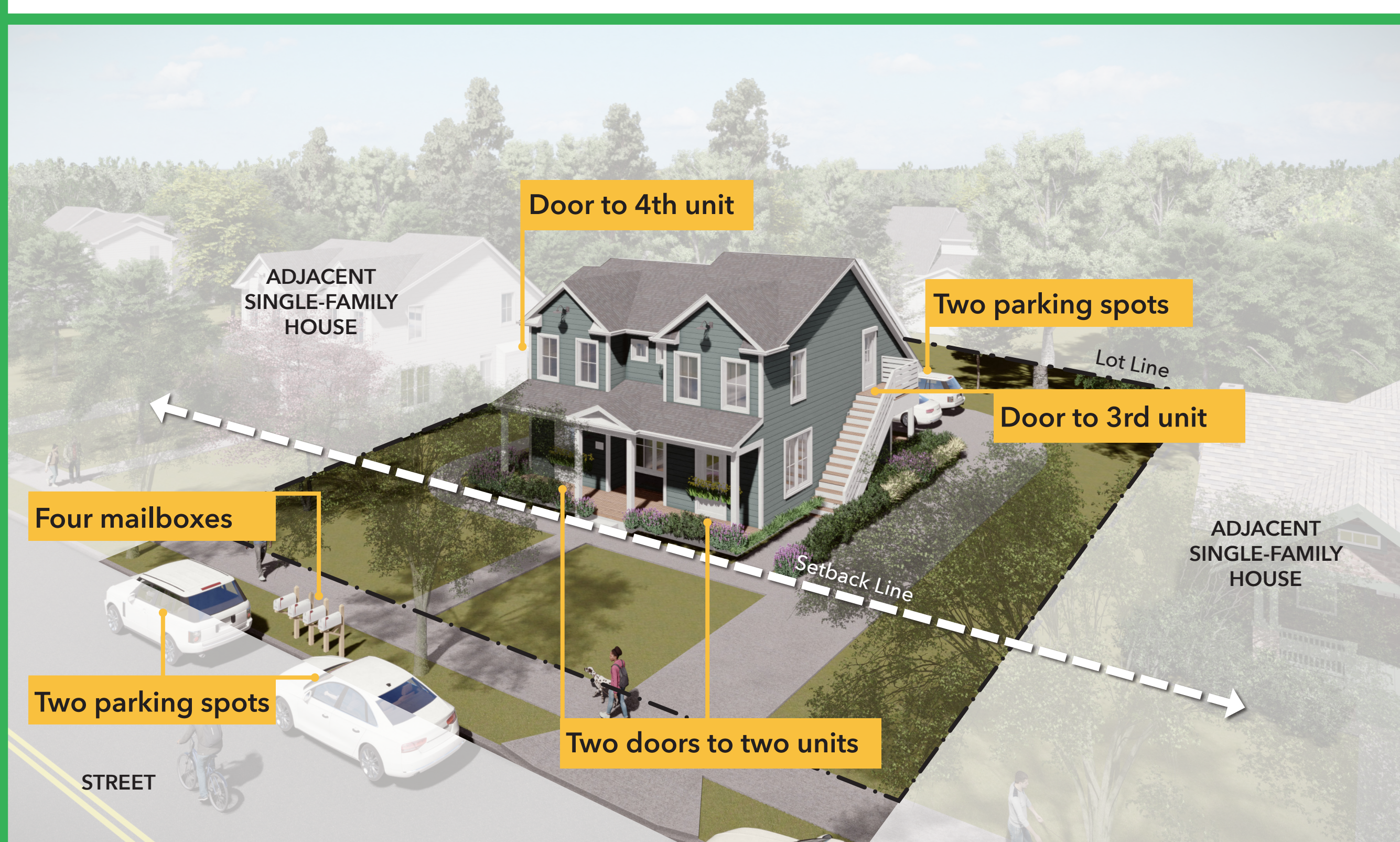
PARKING

3 spaces required - 1 to 2 can be on the street

### IS THIS "AFFORDABLE HOUSING?"

New missing middle housing will result from the renovation of existing homes or the construction of new ones and thus will be subject to the economics of today's housing market. In most cases, such units will provide lower overall costs by virtue of size rather than subsidy or outdated condition, and will provide for-sale and for-rent neighborhood housing options that don't presently exist for individuals, couples or small families.

QUADPLEX



A comparably sized and styled building configured as a quad

4 UNITS

Four 1-bedroom + 1 bath units

PARKING

4 spaces required - 2 can be on the street

However, the proposal would also allow for nonprofit home builders and similar entities like the Decatur Land Trust to provide comparable but subsidized units that do qualify as "affordable housing" as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Such instances would broaden the income diversity of our neighborhoods even further.

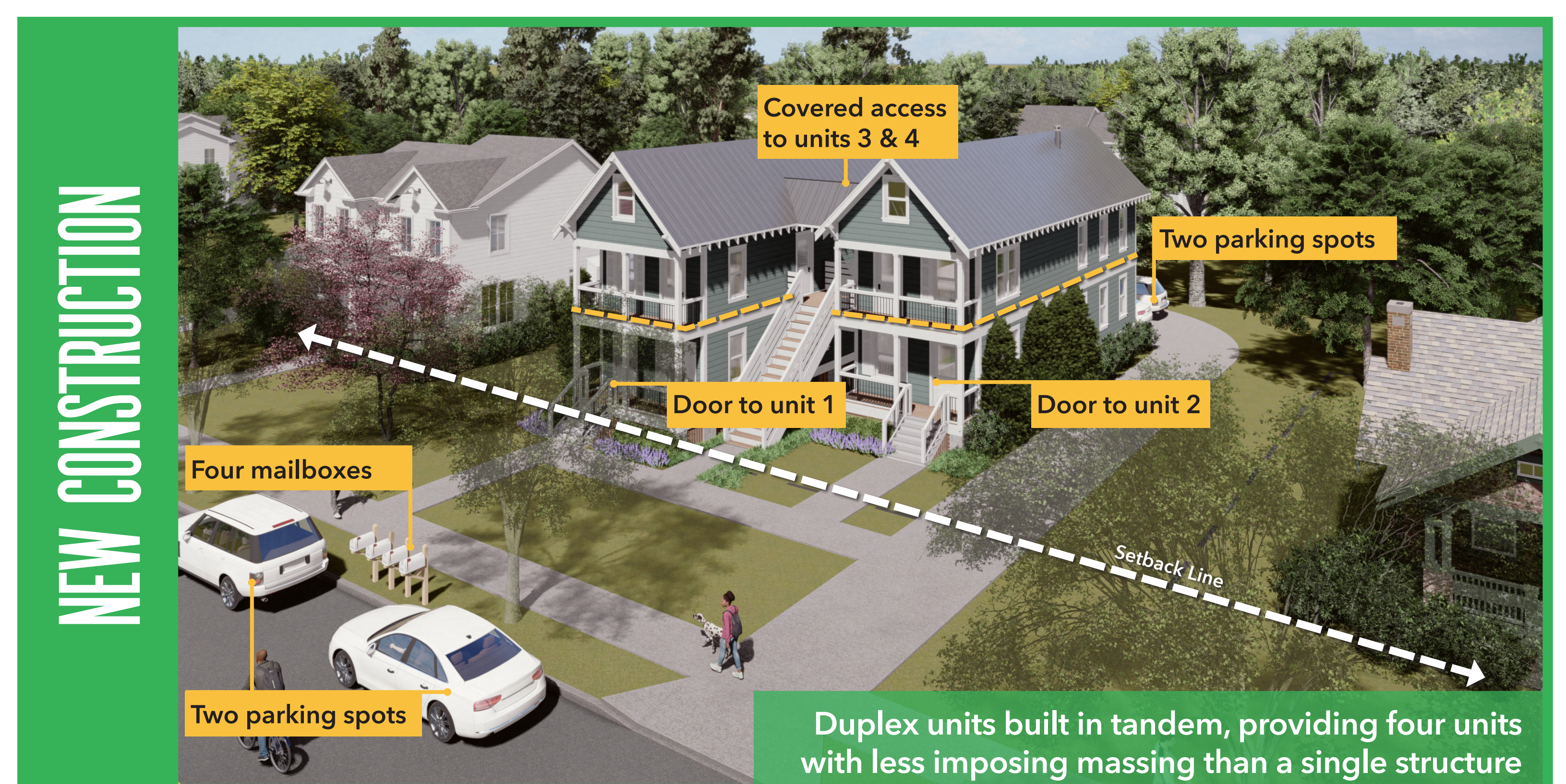
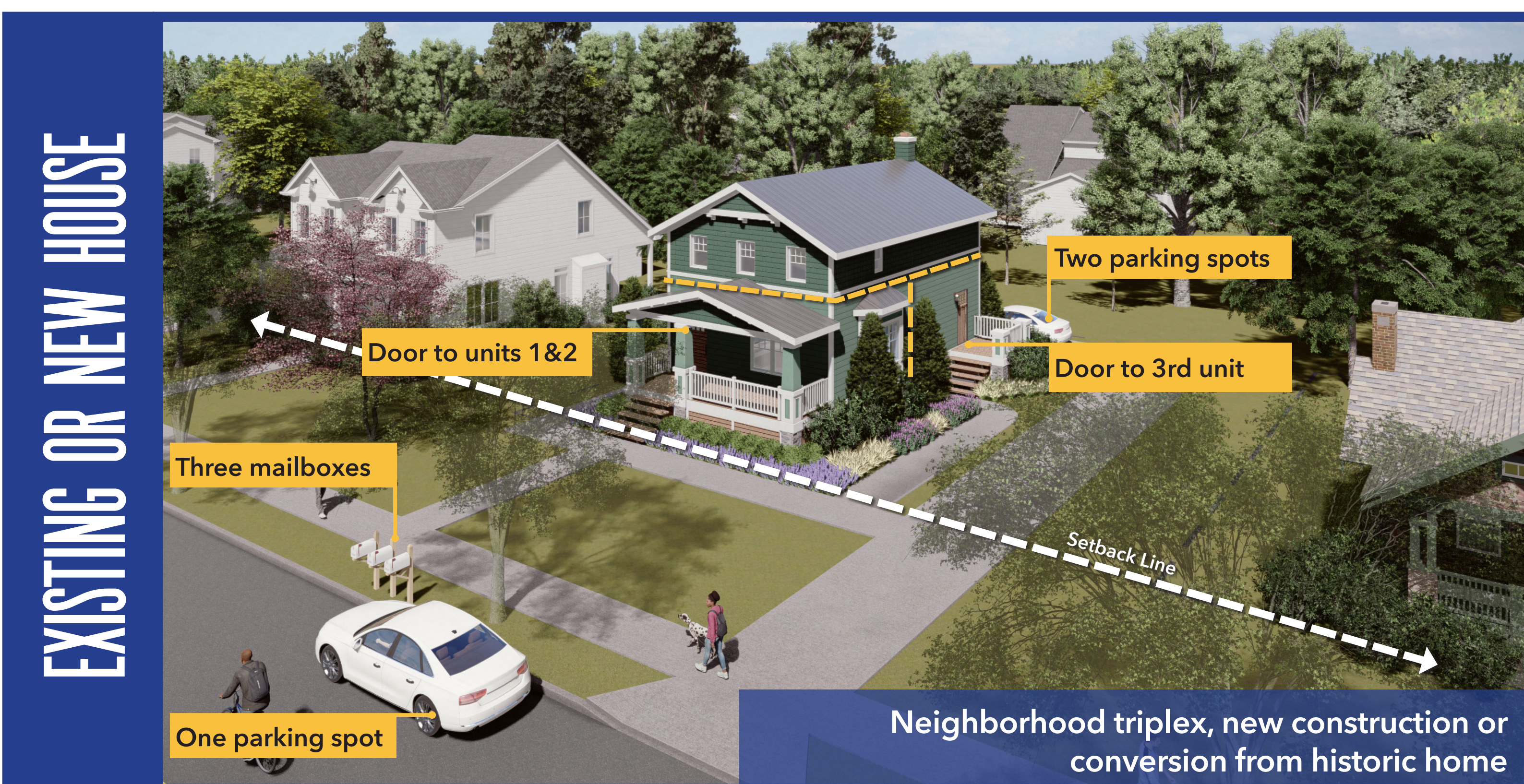
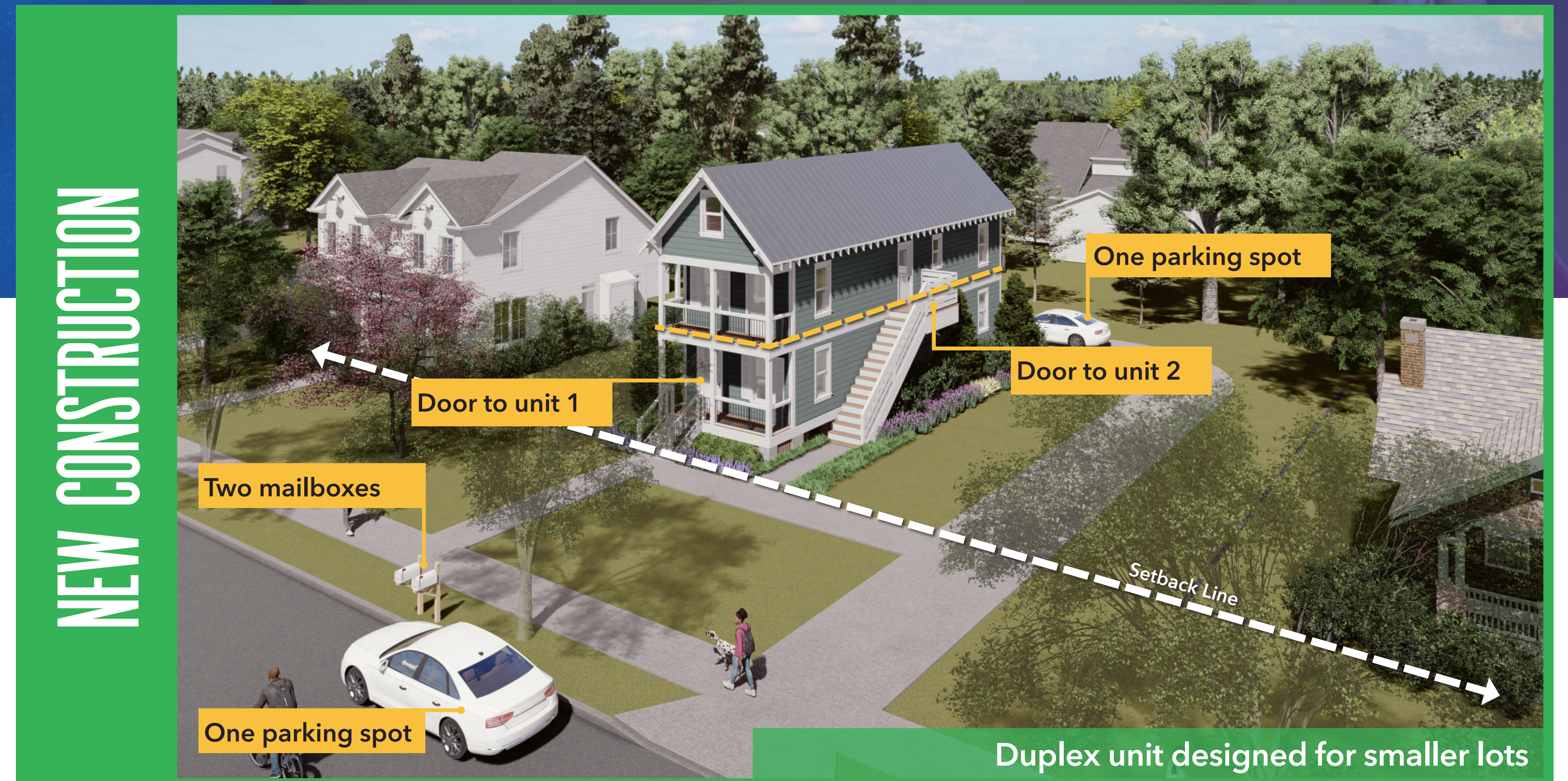
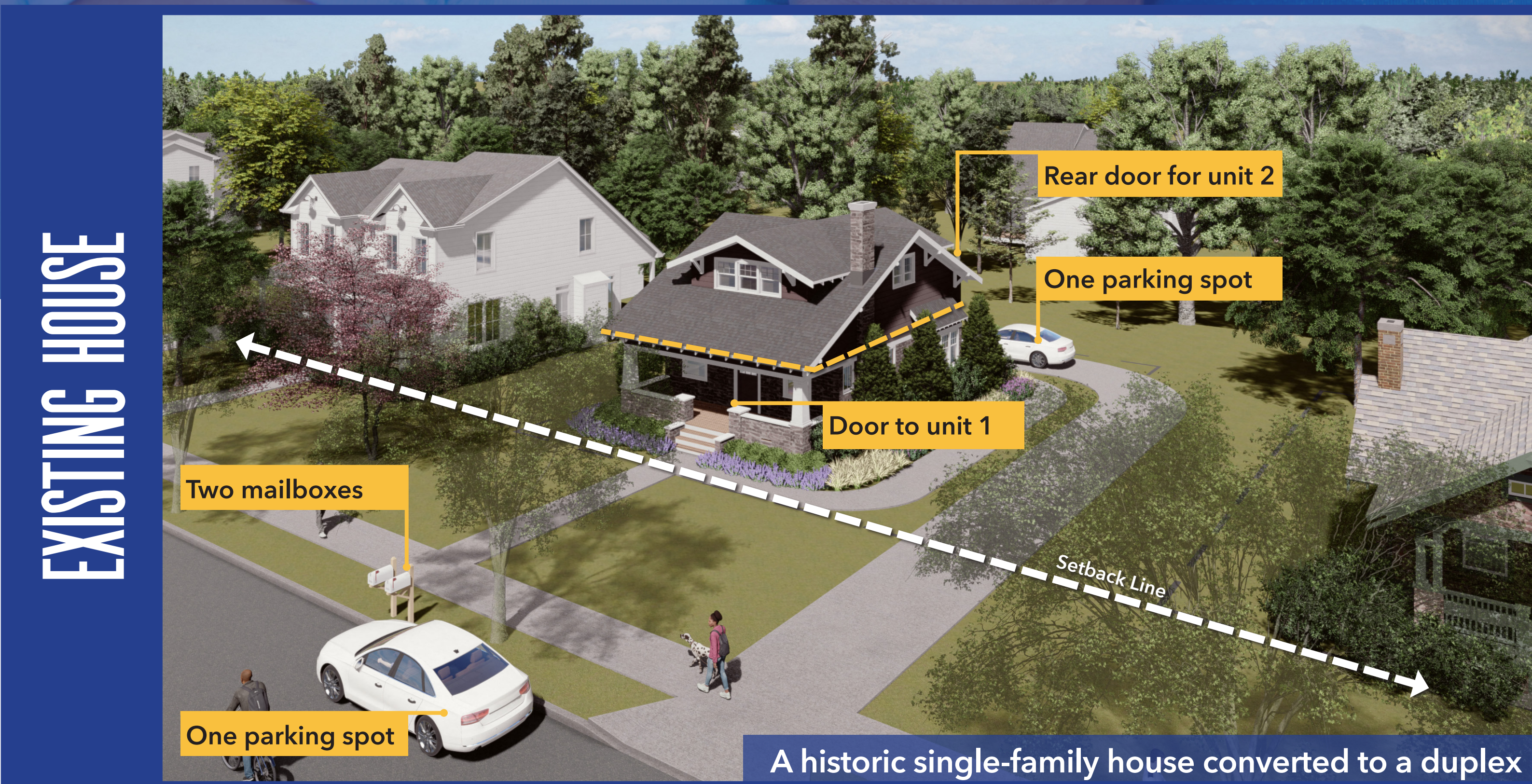
# MORE CHOICES, INCREASED DIVERSITY, AGING IN PLACE

Whether intentional or not, Decatur's present neighborhood zoning segregates our community by price point. Many of our older residents, who could not afford to purchase their home today, are leaving in search of greater affordability and less maintenance. As they do, their properties are being redeveloped as homes in excess of \$1 million, exacerbating the exclusionary outcomes inevitable with our present zoning.

Re-allowing the missing middle housing once so common in Decatur would cultivate a more diverse supply of new construction types – which then becomes more inclusive of a broader range of incomes – and would also allow homeowners to sub-divide their home into multi-units which assists with downsizing, provides for additional retirement income, and helps make aging in place possible.

"I have lived and worked in Decatur for over 25 years. My husband and I have raised our children here. We've grown to love our neighborhood. We really want to stay right in this area. We want to stay close to the neighbors that we're so close to emotionally. We're getting worried because there just don't seem to be many affordable options that suit our needs."

- Peggy Thompson, Decatur resident



## WHAT ABOUT SCHOOL KIDS?

Smaller housing attracts a more diverse array of neighbors, including singles, young couples and older "empty-nesters," which translates to fewer kids. Families are, of course, welcome but in practice we've found that Decatur's existing inventory of historic missing middle housing generates fewer enrollments than the single family homes that surround them.