

## Form-Based Code (FBC) Zoning Information:

*Form-based codes differ considerably from conventional zoning, but they are regulatory and focus on form over function.<sup>1</sup>*

They divide a community into different districts based on the *character and intensity of land development*, as well as the desired urban form. They are based upon a *shared vision of the kind of place the community desires*, not on separating a community into different use areas.

FBCs include specification of what uses are permitted in a building or place, but focus on the physical character of development. They are a method of development regulation, adopted into municipal or county law, *that emphasizes the physical character (form) and includes—but often de-emphasizes—the regulation of land use*. Land use is regulated more broadly, with land use categories in lieu of specific permitted uses.<sup>2</sup>

*It all depends upon the community vision.*

Generally, form-based codes allow higher density in a downtown core area, where there is also mixed use. This gives a community the critical mass needed to support commerce as well as a true “center” and sense of place. A FBC addresses the physical context, such as natural areas, topography, and existing built environment, and is customized to what community residents have said they want, while also serving overall municipal planning objectives. It allows a neighborhood or city to express, develop, and maintain its distinctiveness.

FBCs are customized to the vision of a community to preserve or enhance existing character of a neighborhood or dramatically changing and improving another. *FBCs encourage: a mix of land uses, a mix of housing, it is “proactive (focuses on wants instead of community dislikes), results from a public design process, fits specific places and reflects local architecture, emphasizes site design and building form, provides “sense of place,” and is easier to use than conventional zoning codes.*

*Both conventional zoning and form-based codes regulate use, but in very different ways.*

Some uses clearly fit with a given type of community character better than others, so a form-based code will regulate use—but with a much simpler kind of use table than is found in most zoning codes.

Form-based codes mix uses that work well together synergistically, such as retail shops and upper floor apartments or offices. The goal of creating walkable centers necessitates mixing of uses. It is important to recognize that form-based codes still aim to prevent the juxtaposition of inherently incompatible uses, such as large factories and single-family homes.

A major purpose of conventional zoning codes has always been the separation of uses from one another.

**Think about the ways in which buildings interact with streets and sidewalks to shape public space and make it feel either inviting or hostile**

- How tall are the buildings and how close are they to the sidewalk?
- How wide are the sidewalks?
- Do the building facades have doors and windows along the sidewalk?
- Are there street trees?
- Is there an interconnected network of streets and blocks?
- Does it feel safe to walk or are the cars going too fast?
- Are the blocks short or long?
- Are there alleys and courtyards?
- Is it just as easy to walk around the area as to drive?
- Are there civic buildings?
- Where is the parking?
- What about special public spaces, such as greens, squares and plazas?

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<sup>1</sup> Form Based Codes Institute

<sup>2</sup> CMAP’s Form Based Codes Guide for Communities