

An Introduction to Sustainable Form-Based Codes



Researching People, the Place, and the Processes necessary to identify the desired forms and functions



Creating the Form Based Code with sustainable systems layered into the forms



Applying, Testing, and Refining the Code

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Green Form-Based Codes, Defined

Form-based codes, land development regulations that emphasize the desired physical form - the design, scale, and relationships - of buildings and public space, place less emphasis on the building or land uses. 'Green' Form-Based Codes integrate sustainability into the code standards.

Form-based codes regulate land, infrastructure, and building development, consistent with general or comprehensive plans. They seek to achieve a specific urban form and to shape a higher quality built environment that integrates rather than separates compatible uses. As a supplement, modification, or replacement to city or county zoning and development ordinances, form-based codes help create a predictable public and/or private realm by controlling or regulating its physical form as well as the building intensities and uses. The codes enable the implementation of a community's vision by coding desired outcomes appropriate to specific zones or areas, from the natural landscape through the urban center.

Unlike design guidelines, form-based codes regulate rather recommend or suggest, and prescribe a desired or intended outcome rather than proscribing what's prohibited. In place of controlling building densities through formulas such as floor-area-ratios, dwelling units per acre and parking formulas, form-based codes may control densities by regulating the total permitted buildable volume of space determined, for example, by the total number of floors allowed instead of maximum building heights. Other differences: Using build-to lines or set-back averaging instead of minimum setbacks, and maximum parking ratios and shared parking tables in place of minimum ratios.

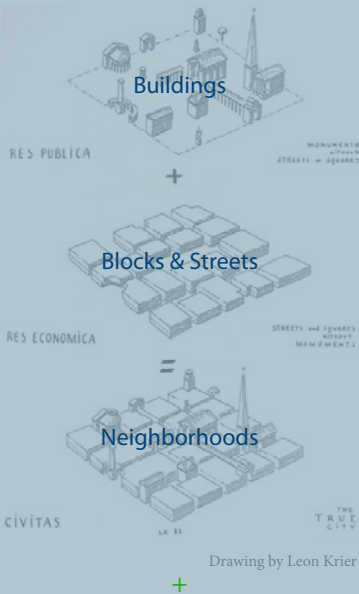
Similarities include the designation of special-use districts and maximum units per acre. Like conventional codes, 'green' form-based codes should be compatible with city and county general or comprehensive plans. The zoning map can evolve into a regulating plan that defines the boundaries of various urbanized zones, the natural and/or agriculture and future development areas, and the trajectories and connections of major thoroughfares. Sustainable standards may be incorporated into both.

The form-based code's regulating plan identifies allowable uses or the percentage of specific uses within each zone through a matrix that may also describe permitted development intensities. Each zone typically includes permitted building types and functions, and elements of the public realm such as the types and scale of thoroughfares, plazas, and parks. Green form-based codes increase the range of compatible development choices by defining an appropriate public context or place for each.

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Green Form Based Codes

for



Sustainability

Code Scale & Type

Green form-based codes may be introduced at the scale of the region, community, neighborhood, or site, and deployed at the general or comprehensive, sector or community, and specific or precise plan level. The code encompasses land zoning and subdivision regulations, and may include urban design, architectural and landscape standards, street and open space standards, and sustainability requirements - but not building/life safety codes.

The range and complexity of elements and details are defined by each jurisdiction, from identifying incompatible uses that require separation or other restrictions, to determining whether to specify or constrain architectural expressions or styles.



Code Implementation

Green form-based codes may be generated from scratch, borrowed and modified from other adopted form-based codes, or adapted from 'open-source' templates or form-based models such as the DPZ SmartCode™. If derived externally, the form-based code requires local customization or calibration by public and private planners and designers with adequate jurisdictional and community input to reflect a community's vision. The code should incorporate comprehensive green or sustainable systems and elements, and combine time-tested urban forms within the economical, social, aesthetic, and environmental context.

Since Green form-based codes represent regulations that may not initially include the root policies or goals, the excellence of development outcomes and level of sustainability will be dependent on the qualities of the vision, goals, and objectives described in the region, community, or local plans that the code implements.



Built Outcome of Architectural Standards



continued next page

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Green form-based codes may be tested, refined, and adopted using several common methods to introduce, prepare, and integrate the regulations into established jurisdictional systems. Ultimately, the adoption of form-based codes, a legislative act, require a review and adoption process similar to plan or zoning regulations in California, Arizona, Florida and states with similar statutes: planning commission public hearings, recommendations to the local legislative body, and a city or county council or board of supervisors' public hearings prior to adoption of the regulations, and the potential environmental review.

Alternative testing and adoption approaches include:

- Pilot projects, focused on a limited area, that may include form-based codes executed in the form of specific plans, special purpose zones, or 'hybrid' codes.
- Integrating the sustainable or **green** requirements into all relevant sections and standards of the code.
- Specific plans and other limited area codes that may include a form-based code in California and a number of other states that allow a specific plan to include zoning regulations unique to its bounded or defined area, that supersede those in the citywide zoning code. However, unlike planned development ordinances that stipulate project-specific standards and densities, the best form-based code facilitates flexibility and choice within a desired range of form and functional rules.
- Special purpose zones within conventional codes that provide a variation to the specific plan or limited area alternative. A jurisdiction may choose to adopt a new form-based zoning regulation by establishing and applying one or more new zones to specific limited areas within the jurisdiction through amendments to an existing conventional code text and property re-zonings. The outcome, a "hybrid code", retains the "conventional" zones and related standards of the existing code in areas that are not rezoned. The integration of form-based code provisions into a more extensive conventional code requires careful attention to the details of linkages or 'bridges' to other standards and procedures in the code.
- Alternative or "parallel optional codes" that consist of incentive-based form-based codes that a development applicant may choose to apply under instead of the conventional jurisdiction-wide code. The incentives include a more predictable and straightforward development review

process for the applicant under the form-base code. The range of possible development types available to them can be more both cost-effective and more marketable than those allowed by the conventional code. For the jurisdiction, the option can result in incrementally better development. However, given the complexity of planning and zoning in states like California, this approach increases the difficulty of administering two codes, and the potential for confusion over the requirements of two systems.

While introducing a new form-based zones into a conventional code could be an effective pilot project in the phased replacement of an existing code, this approach may create public uncertainty about the jurisdiction's commitment to better development. What's more, a code with two different "vocabularies" regarding regulation can be technically confusing to applicants and more difficult to administer. However, this approach may a feasible option for those jurisdictions that wish to move into the field incrementally, or where political support may be tenuous.

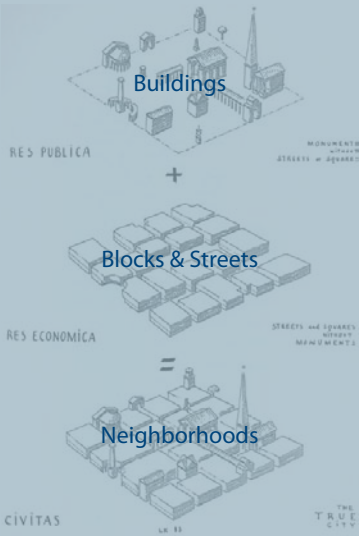
Comprehensive replacement of existing code with a form-based code creates the greatest range of opportunities for transforming targeted areas of a jurisdiction while maintaining established character in others. This approach is less expensive in smaller communities than larger, as would be in any conventional planning process, and offers the advantage of making the changes in a regulatory vocabulary employing procedures consistent throughout the code. However, this methodoogy potentially represents the most complicated, both logistically and politically.

The best-loved communities and neighborhoods throughout the country – where social, environmental, and economic values remain stable over long periods of time, and periodic large-scale redevelopment or reconstruction is generally unnecessary – are places where land uses and sustainability are integrated with a distinct, coherent, and appropriately scaled urban form and character. A well-designed form-based code provides an essential means to create or reestablish those kinds of places.

Conventional vs Form Based Zoning THE DIFFERENCES Coding

Green FORM BASED CODES

for



Sustainability

Conventional



Single-Use zoning legalizes separated, non-integrated places, and decreases walkability



F.A.R. - dominated, single use codes incentivize drive-to big boxes and parking lots - commercial sprawl



Focusing on use instead of form creates unsustainable subdivision pods



Conventional coding by zoning map and text results in "cookie cutter" places



Coding for the car produces a car-oriented environment like the strip center

Form-Based



Green-oriented mixed-use coding helps create walkable, sustainable places



The right choice of form, character, and uses yields place-making



Focusing on form and sustainable functions helps create new or reinvigorate existing green neighborhoods



Form-based coding by graphics and text produce diverse and adaptable places



Coding for business, transit, pedestrians, bikes, and cars produces Active Green Streets

Green Form Based Code Presentation Request/Questionnaire

To request a **Green** Form Based Code Introduction presentation, please complete the request and questionnaire form below, and return to by post, fax, or email to Steve Coyle. Each one hour Form Base Code Introduction consists of a 30 minute presentation and 30 minute discussion period. The Introductions will remain free for governmental agencies and non-profit organizations until further notice. However, we request at least ten (10) attendees per event, and provision of a suitable room and projection screen or wall for the presentation.

Name: _____ Title: _____

Agency or NGO: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Preferred Presentation Dates: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Start Time: _____

Preferred Location: _____

No. of Expected Attendees: _____ Representing: _____

Please describe your Interest in a Form Base Code presentation and your jurisdiction and/or department:

Please describe the Concerns you face or Opportunities you might leverage to create a Form Based Code:

Please return the completed request/questionnaire via:
fax: 510.451.7008 Attention, Steve Coyle
email: steve@town-green.com

