Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Form Based Codes (But were afraid to ask)

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Outline

- What are Form Based Codes and how did they come about?
- When and where should Form Based Codes be used?
- Under the hood - How do Form Based Codes work?
- Where are Form Based Codes being implemented?
What are Form Based Codes and how did they come about?

New York City, 1916
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Enter Form based codes:

- A new type of land development code as a response to conventional zoning, intended to make mixed-use, compact, walkable places *legal and buildable once again.*

- Essentially, they are codes that support “place-making” – to create unique character, identity, sense of place, and charm.
What are Form Based Codes and how did they come about?

**Associated Benefits**

- Intended to create greater certainty and predictability – fewer variances
- Can streamline the process for the type of development envisioned
- Visual - Easier for general public to understand
- Usually created as part of a public visioning & planning process, which fosters greater support and buy-in.
When and where should Form Based Codes be used?

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• Along commercial, auto-oriented corridors where municipalities want to **reverse economic decline and disinvestment, and improve safety**.

• In new growth areas or greenfield sites where a municipality wants to enable or require **new development** to engender a distinct sense of place, to be pedestrian-friendly, walkable, transit-oriented, etc.
When and where should Form Based Codes be used?

If local plans call for maintaining the status quo, FBC probably not needed here
Under the hood - How do Form Based Codes work?

Organizing Framework – the Urban to Rural Transect

Character or context zones
Under the hood - How do Form Based Codes work?

Elements of a FBC

- Regulating Plan
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- Frontage Type standards
- Architectural/signage standards
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**Implementation Options**

- Optional FBC overlay
- Mandatory within the defined boundaries of a FBC district
- Jurisdiction-wide FBC
- “Hybrid” (conventional zoning ordinance that includes form based elements where appropriate)
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While FBCs are 35 years old, 87% of the adopted codes were 2003 to now.

362 form-based codes were adopted from 1981 to now.

Source: Codes Study, Hazel Borys and Emily Talen, as of March 2016, Creative Commons NonCommercial ShareAlike License
Where are Form Based Codes being implemented?

Codes Study: SmartCodes and Other Form-Based Codes

Source: Hazel Borys & Emily Talen | 618 Codes plus 16 Guidelines Tracked as of March 2016 | Creative Commons NonCommercial ShareAlike License
Where are Form Based Codes being implemented?

Downtown Cambridge, Maryland

Neighborhood General (NG) Standards

Urban General (UG) Standards
Resources

Formbasedcodes.org

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