

Definition of a Form-Based Code

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A method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form. Form-based codes create a predictable public realm primarily by controlling physical form, with a lesser focus on land use, through city or county regulations.

Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in Form-based codes, presented in both diagrams and words, are keyed to a *regulating plan* that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore, character) of development rather than only distinctions in land-use types. This is in contrast to conventional zoning's focus on the micromanagement and segregation of land uses, and the control of development intensity through abstract and uncoordinated parameters (e.g., FAR, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic LOS) to the neglect of an integrated built form. Not to be confused with design guidelines or general statements of policy, Form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory.

Form-based codes are drafted to achieve a community vision based on time-tested forms of urbanism. Ultimately, a Form-based code is a tool; the quality of development outcomes is dependent on the quality and objectives of the community plan that a code implements.

Form-based codes commonly include the following elements:

- *Regulating Plan.* A plan or map of the regulated area designating the locations where different building form standards apply, based on clear community intentions regarding the physical character of the area being code.
- *Public Space Standards.* Specifications for the elements within the public realm (e.g., sidewalks, travel lanes, on-street parking, street trees, street furniture, etc.).
- *Building Form Standards.* Regulations controlling the configuration, features, and functions of buildings that define and shape the public realm.
- *Administration.* A clearly defined application and project review process.
- *Definitions.* A glossary to ensure the precise use of technical terms.

Form-based codes also sometimes include:

- *Architectural Standards.* Regulations controlling external architectural materials and quality.
- *Landscaping Standards.* Regulations controlling landscape design and plant materials on private property as they impact public spaces (e.g. regulations about parking lot screening and shading, maintaining sight lines, insuring unobstructed pedestrian movements, etc.).

- *Signage Standards.* Regulations controlling allowable signage sizes, materials, illumination, and placement.
- *Environmental Resource Standards.* Regulations controlling issues such as storm water drainage and infiltration, development on slopes, tree protection, solar access, etc.
- *Annotation.* Text and illustrations explaining the intentions of specific code provisions.