



Helping Communities face the challenge and impacts of growth while maintaining community character and a sense of place.

FACT SHEET: 3

Form-Based Codes

iTRaC is the Nashua Regional Planning Commission's new approach to community planning that focuses on integrating transportation, land use and environmental planning. The program was developed to assist communities in dealing with the challenges of growth in a coordinated way that sustains community character and a sense of place.

What is Form Based Code?

Form-based codes is a concept that began in New York City in 1916 with a zoning ordinance (code) that utilized three maps instead of the common single land use map. The three-map code regulated height and bulk in addition to use.

Instead of the traditional focus on land use in local ordinances, form-based codes focus on the appearance and public perception of buildings, their relationship to one another and to the public areas that surround them. See the definition provided in the box to the right.

Public participation is a very important part of form-based codes. Understanding how a community views itself now and how it would like to look in the future is key to developing a code that will bring these visions to reality.

Advantages of Form-based Codes

Form-based codes support "Smarter Growth" where conventional codes can be problematic. Form-based codes are based on what a community wants rather than what it does not want. It is easier to convey to land owners and developers what is acceptable, and thus achieve the desired physical appearance in conjunction with the underlying uses taking place within a building.

Form-based codes are easier to understand for laypeople because they are shorter, more concise and utilize visual representations more than conventional code. Numerous issues such as building height, viewsheds and density can be addressed in a single figure that specifically depicts what is permissible in a given district. See the "transect" figure on the following page as an example of the simplicity in this type of code.

DEFINITION:

Form-based codes place a primary emphasis on building type, dimensions, parking location and façade features, and less emphasis on uses. They stress the appearance of the streetscape, or public realm, over long lists of different use types. These codes have the following characteristics:

Zoning Districts – Form-based codes are defined around districts, neighborhoods and corridors where conventional zoning districts may bear no relationship to the transportation framework or the larger area.

Regulatory Focus – Form-based codes de-emphasize density and use regulation in favor of rules for building form. They recognize that uses may change over time, but the building will endure.

Uses – Form-based codes emphasize mixed use and a mix of housing types to bring destinations into close proximity to housing and provide housing choices to meet many individuals' needs at different times in their lives.

Design – Greater attention is given to streetscape and the design of the public realm, and the role of individual buildings in shaping the public realm. Form-based codes recognize how critical these public spaces are to defining and creating a "place."

Public Participation – A design-focused public participation process is essential to assure thorough discussion of land use issues as the code is created. This helps reduce conflict, misunderstanding and the need for hearings as individual projects are reviewed.

Modified from definition by Paul Crawford, AICP

Source: http://www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land_Use/fact_sheets/form_based_codes.pdf



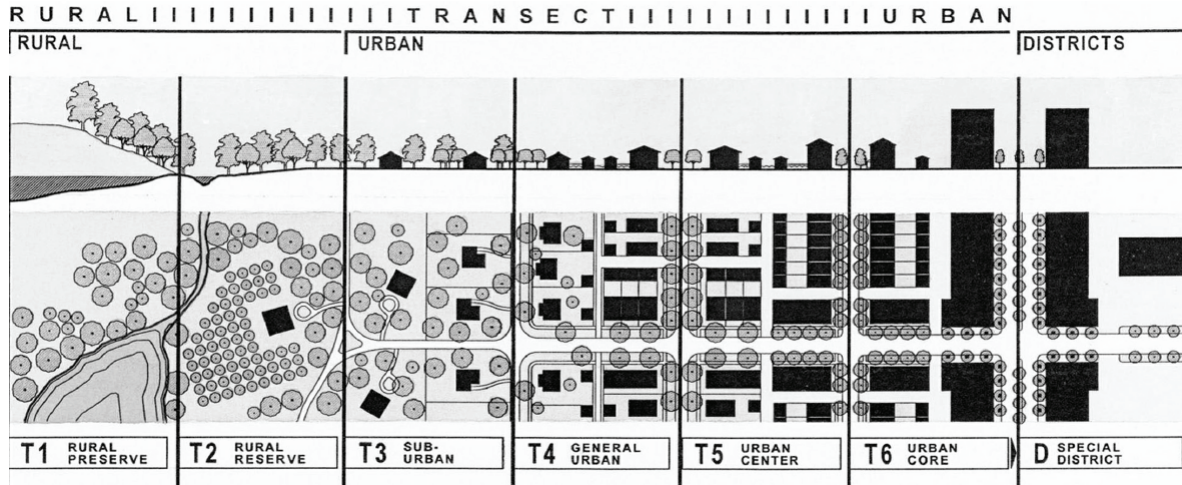
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Form-Based Codes

The use of form-based codes is not restricted to urban environments. The urban/rural “transect” (*Andres Duany*) below provides a pictorial depiction of the transition from rural to an urban landscape and acceptable land development through form-based codes. In this case, a picture is worth a thousand words. The six districts and special district show how the desired intensity of uses and the relationship to the surroundings can be clearly conveyed. Associated ordinance text would be clear and concise.



Source: http://www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land_Use/fact_sheets/form_based_codes.pdf



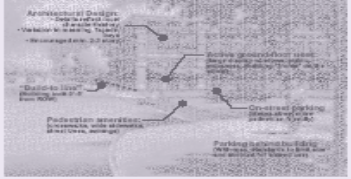
Advantages of Form-based Codes (continued)

Use of form-based codes for infill development and redevelopment of existing parcels will facilitate implementation of a community's vision over time. Form-based codes help support sustainable transportation networks and provide greater capacity for the same lane-miles constructed through “nodal” development plans. Form-based codes can help manage infrastructure investments.

How Do We Get Started?

The iTRaC program can assist selected communities in assessing their existing code through a “Coordinated Planning Audit”. This process can provide the resources and tools to begin the development of a community vision for future development that is well thought out, integrates all aspects of planning and preserves a sense of place. In addition, public meetings and visioning charrettes with residents and professional planners can facilitate bringing community vision to reality.

Form-based Codes are critical to successful plan implementation

Develop a Plan

- Identify natural asset protection
- Define nodal development locations
- Define the future infrastructure network

Amend Zoning

- Establish corridor's form and land use
- Based on analysis of district's distinct character

Build to Code

- Apply design standards
- Apply street typologies and standards
- Implement amenities
- Support through public investment

CREATING PLACES WHERE **HDR** PEOPLE WANT TO BE

Source: <http://www.cmccg.com/media/handouts/260126/SAT-PDF/480-Whidden.pdf>

For more details on this topic or an overview of the entire iTRaC program, contact Camille Pattison, iTRaC Program Manager to schedule the iTRaC introductory presentation. camillep@nashuarpc.org

