Form Based Codes

A Practical Guide

LSL Planning, Inc.
The Zoning Dilemma…

Restaurant?

Outdoor Seating?

On-Site Brewing?

Second story office or residential?

Live-work units?

On-street parking?
Problems with Euclidean Zoning

Traditional zoning is primarily minimum requirements, can limit creativity & adaptability...

so, we get more of what most of us agree we don’t like
Problems with Euclidean Zoning

- Primary regulates use
- Not user friendly/complex
- Not flexible
- Leads to mediocrity & conformity
- Minimum requirements instead of what is desired
- Isolates different uses
Problems with Design Guidelines

Design guidelines can improve the appearance but not the form
Key Differences

Traditional Zoning

USE

Focused on use

Form Based Codes

FORM Operations

More focus on design & form
<table>
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<th><strong>Key Differences</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Zoning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Form Based Codes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use-based</td>
<td>De-emphasize use</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Districts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Neighborhoods/streets</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis on individual uses of property, rigid use of lot size &amp; building placement</td>
<td>Emphasis on building relationships &amp; on fitting building to its use &amp; surroundings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Segregation of land uses</td>
<td>Mixed uses</td>
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<td><strong>Uniformity in neighborhoods</strong></td>
<td><strong>Diversity in neighborhoods</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited ability to effect change</td>
<td>Ability to transform or preserve</td>
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<td>Limited design standards</td>
<td>Focus on building/site form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setbacks</td>
<td>Build to lines</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on site; little on right-of-way</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attention to street &amp; streetscape</strong></td>
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Form Based Codes

Can be used to:

- Maintain – Existing character, historical quality
- Improve – Aesthetics, function
- Transform – Create a desired image

Advantages:

- Create certainty of development
- Speed approvals
- Shift emphasis from zoning compliance to development quality
FBC’s are Based on Design Principles
Mixed Use Areas/Downtowns

- Retail on the ground floor (for main street locations), retail helps to make the street active & interesting
- Vehicle storage, garbage & mechanical equipment are kept away from the street
- Share parking (not including on-street parking) and in the rear
FBC’s are Based on Design Principles

- Apartments over commercial
- Sidewalk cafés
- Urban spaces
- Pedestrian oriented
How is it Regulated?

- Purpose & Intent – District & Regulations
- Regulation by Type
- Administrative Departures

Regulation by Type

Use, Site & Building Placement, Building Elements, Accessory – Signs, Parking, Lighting, Landscaping
How is it Regulated?

Listening to our neighbors is important. The neighborhood association is an important group to work with.
General Process

- Develop the commitment to better places
- Determine type of code desired – Hybrid, Parallel, FBC
- Identify existing “forms” of the community that should be maintained or new ones that should be achieved
- Describe & document
- Develop Code that matches the forms
Determining the “Form” then Documenting

Charrette

Measurements
What is Regulated?

Building Elements
- Transparency, Articulation, Roofs, Materials, Entry, Height

Building Site & Placement
- Lot Dimensions, Perimeter Setbacks, Build-To Lines

Use
- Use Categories, Approvals

Accessory Provisions
- Parking, Signs, Landscaping, Screening, Sidewalks, Accessory Buildings, Lighting
What is Regulated?

Building Elements

Transparency
Materials
Articulation
What is Regulated?

Building Elements

Entries

Height & Roof

Entries
What is Regulated?
Building Site/Placement

Front Yard Setbacks  “Build-To Line”
What is Regulated?

Public Realm

- Sidewalks
- Pedestrian amenities
- Streetscape design
- Parking
- Street width
- Traffic calming
- Utilities
- Public spaces
Pitfalls

- Form Based Codes require an Illustrative Plan
- Codes cost 2-4x a traditional ZO
- Design assistance needed to draft
- More difficult to tie street & lot design in MI
- Developers will oppose “planners designing our products”
- Application – community-wide, subareas?
- Complaints:
  - Too Discretionary
  - Lack of Specific Enabling Legislation
  - Not Environmentally Sensitive
Where FBC’s are being Used

- Grand Rapids
- Fremont
- Genoa Twp. (new Town Center)
- Farmington downtown
- Alexandira, VA subarea
- Phoenix, AZ
- Louisville, KY
- Ft. Meyers Beach, FL
- Hercules, CA
- Petaluma, CA
- Kendall / Miami, FL
Potential FBC Benefits

- Affordable housing
- 1st floor retail
- Historic preservation & complementary infill
- Pedestrian amenities
- Emphasis on form over density facilitates TDR’s & incentives (public spaces, green design, public art, etc.)
Questions ?