



FORM BASED CODE DATA SHEET

WHAT IS A FORM BASED CODE?

A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code.

A form-based code is a regulation, not a mere guideline, adopted into city, town, or county law. A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation.

FORM BASED CODES...

- Are based upon a shared vision of the kind of place the community desires, not on separating a community into different use areas.
- Regulate development that controls building form first and building use second
- Divide a community into different districts based on the character and intensity of land development, as well as the desired urban form.

ZONING AND FBCS

Form-based codes differ considerably from conventional zoning, but they are still zoning. Unlike conventional zoning, the focus of a form-based code is on how buildings relate to the streetscape, not on what uses occur inside of them.

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 are presented in both words and clearly drawn diagrams and other visuals. They 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 approach contrasts with 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., floor area ratio, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic level of service), 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. They are drafted to implement a community plan. They try to achieve a community vision.

While FBCs are over 30 years old, 86% have been adopted since 2003. Over 344 FBCs have been adopted between and 1981 and 2014

— *Better Cities and Towns, 2015*

Sources:

Form Based Code Institute
Cranberry Township, PA
Better Cities and Towns
New Urban Roswell Blog

FBC'S IN PENNSYLVANIA

Property development in Cranberry Township, as in most U.S. municipalities, is regulated by zoning laws. Each zone designates which particular type of land use – residential, retail, industrial, office space, and so on – is allowed on properties inside that zone. But, according to the Township, the widespread use of single-use zoning regulations encourages sprawl and discourages efficient, walkable development.

In 2008, the Board of Supervisors of Cranberry Township adopted a new approach to building regulation, called form-based zoning, to allow a greater mix of uses within a single district and to facilitate more compact and pedestrian-oriented development.

This form based zoning places the physical form of a construction project ahead of its intended use, leading to more efficient, pedestrian-oriented building patterns suitable for mixed uses.

ACCORDING TO CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP...

A form-based code provides a flexible tool – one that will help the Township guide and manage growth and make best use of resources by eliminating the need to continually amend the zoning code. A FBC is simpler to administer because it creates a sense of predictability among Township property owners and developers and offers the flexibility to guide growth in a way that's sustainable over the long term, without compromising use control.

Key Differences

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

THE PROCESS

A form-based code is most effective when it implements a community's vision for its future. A public engagement process is essential to developing the community's vision and should be done early in the process, with the active involvement of those affected. The idea is to get everyone in the same room together to work through differences and arrive at a common vision.

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