



## Form-Based Codes

### SACOG Manual Assists in Code Development

For jurisdictions looking to update or revise their development codes into a more graphic-oriented document, SACOG has made publicly available its Form-Based Codes Handbook for download. Form-based codes are becoming a more commonly used way of communicating the type of development that a jurisdiction wants and what is allowed. They are much more graphic-oriented and provide visual examples of what the jurisdiction is trying to achieve, making the development process more predictable and objective, while resulting in products that are a win-win for all stakeholders. Many jurisdictions throughout the United States are turning to form-based codes.

SACOG's Form-Based Code Handbook provides background information on form-based codes, when to use it, and, most importantly, a practical step-by-step guide on how to create one. Although the case studies are not actual form-based codes, they illustrate the steps and considerations needed to create a form-based code. The case study prototypes are for a small downtown revitalization, a new greenfield development, a suburban revitalization effort, and urban infill and redevelopment area.

### How Do Form-Based Codes Differ From Conventional Zoning Codes?

Form-based codes are a relatively new method to regulate the development of buildings and streets to be more consistent with what the community desires.

Most local governments in the United States use conventional zoning codes as the tool to regulate land use and development. Because the original purpose of zoning was to prevent incompatible uses from moving into the neighborhood, conventional zoning regulations are often reactive, focusing on what is not allowed. Zoning requirements are usually applied generically throughout the community.

Conventional zoning ordinances apply street design standards on general street classification (i.e., arterial, collector, or local) without integration to planned community land use changes. It is common for an arterial street to have the same design as it travels through employment, commercial, and residential districts. Conventional zoning codes are subject to interpretation and have resulted in differences between community vision and physical development. Conventional codes often are more text intensive. Form-based codes use visual illustrations and extensive public involvement.

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### To Request a Form-Based Code Handbook

Contact Greg Chew at  
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For more information go to:  
[www.sacog.org/resources](http://www.sacog.org/resources)



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## Form-based Codes Emphasize Physical Character

Form-based codes are development regulations used by local government agencies that emphasize the physical character of development and de-emphasize the regulation of land use. They provide greater predictability about the look and feel of development and offer developers a clearer understanding of what the community seeks. In return, form-based codes can make it easier for residents to help create the physical development they want, which will more likely lead to their acceptance of development and street designs in their community.

While form-based codes have been around for a while, only in the past few years have local governments across the United States increasingly moved toward using them.

Form-based codes differ from conventional zoning because they:

- are the result of a public design process, which creates a clear and articulate vision for a defined district or neighborhood;
- pay greater attention to the design of the public realm and the importance that streetscape design and individual building character have in defining public spaces and a special sense of place;
- emphasize site design and building form over density and use regulations. Form-based codes pay more attention to the buildings, which will last many years, instead of uses that change over time;
- encourage a mix of uses and housing types to reduce the need to travel as part of one's daily routine; and
- make much greater use of illustrations to explain important design elements, rather than relying on numeric standards and text.



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