

Form-Based Codes: An Introductory Course

November 3-5, 2005; Alexandria, Virginia

“Rather than reform existing zoning codes, it generally is best to throw them out and start from scratch, putting in place a form-based code that will make it easy to do the right thing. A form-based code focuses on how the buildings address the street and sidewalks, leaving decisions to the market about types of uses, the amount of parking provided on site, and architecture.”

Chris Leinberger,
Urban Land,
November/ December 2004

Civic leaders and planning professionals are turning increasingly to New Urban development approaches to avoid the well-documented pitfalls of sprawl. Unfortunately most zoning regulations still mandate outcomes that innovative planners would like to avoid— isolated single-use pods, overly wide roads, too much parking and excessive setbacks from nearby streets and buildings. Because existing regulations are so out of step with desired growth patterns, many communities are reconsidering their zoning ordinances; still others are revising or recreating them altogether. In facing the realities of limited time and budget, a common strategy is to layer guidelines over the existing zoning to achieve greater design control.

But will these new rules create better places or will they simply create watered-down hybrid developments and add greater friction to an already overburdened development review process? Furthermore, will well-intentioned design guidelines actually increase the risk of legal challenges caused by inconsistencies with a community’s underlying zoning?

One regulatory technique that is leading to successful outcomes across the country is **form-based coding**. This emerging approach recognizes that a community’s physical form is its most intrinsic and enduring characteristic. The form referenced in the name includes not just buildings and blocks but other physical elements such as

streets and squares; civic infrastructure such as bridges, rail lines and canals; and the relationship of manmade elements to natural features such as lakes, forests, riparian corridors and bluffs.

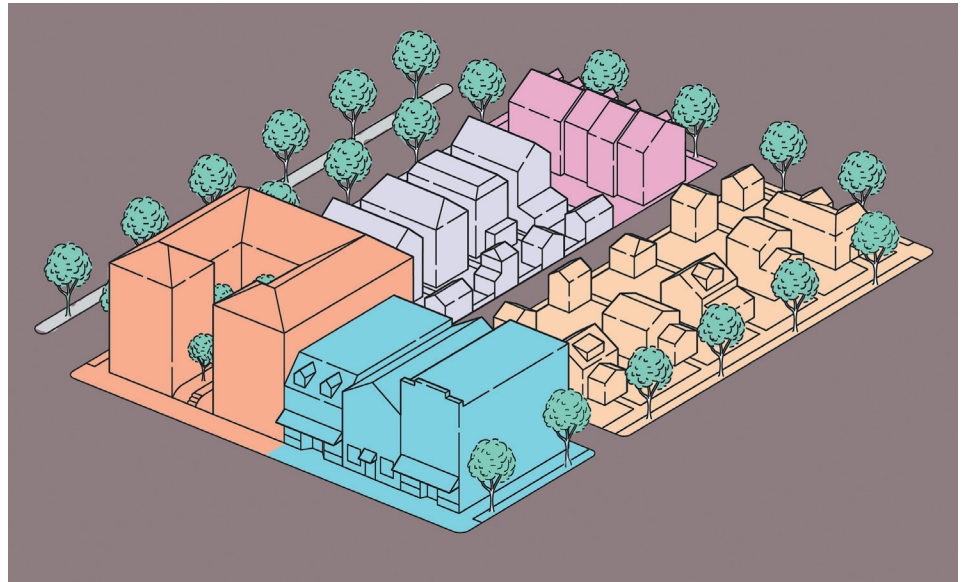
The process of form-based coding works well with public participation. Because the codes are expressed visually in a way that’s easily understandable to nonprofessionals, citizens are often more willing to accept higher density and/or greater intensity. And unlike the more vague, aesthetic- or style-based design guidelines that are sometimes mistaken for form-based codes, this new approach offers a level of precision and legal consistency that many believe will enhance their enforceability and reduce the need for discretionary design review.

Virginia Tech’s Academy for the New Urbanism, in partnership with the Form-Based Codes Institute (FBCI), is pleased to announce an introductory course on the subject of form-based codes (FBC). Two follow-on courses, one focused on design-related aspects of coding and another focused on administrative and legal issues will further prepare professionals for FBCI’s Certificate in Form-Based Codes.

Faculty for the introductory course will be drawn from among these FBC leaders: Paul Crawford, Victor Dover, Andres Duany, Geoffrey Ferrell, Peter Katz, Joseph Kohl, Mary Madden, Steve Mouzon, Dan Parolek, Karen Parolek, Stefanos Polyzoides, Sam Poole,

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Example of how a form-based code subdivides a typical block into specific areas within which only certain building types may be constructed.



Steve Price, Robert Sitkowski, Dan Slone and Bill Spikowski.

The introductory course will include such topics as:

- History and Principles of Development Regulation
- Existing Conditions Analysis: How to Read a Community's DNA
- Detailed Review of FBC Components
- Document Design and Writing Considerations
- Legal Issues Related to FBCs
- Urban Design / Street Design Considerations
- Issues of Public Process

Course activities include lectures by leading FBC practitioners, group discussions and hands-on team exercises. The introductory course will be taught

at Virginia Tech's Alexandria Center located in the heart of historic Old Town Alexandria.

The **Form-Based Codes Institute** is a nonprofit corporation engaged in research, standards setting, outreach and education related to its mission of advancing the use and acceptance of form-based codes. For more information go to www.formbasedcodes.org.

The **Academy for the New Urbanism** is a program of the Planning Academy at Virginia Tech. The academy provides ongoing training for mid-career planning, design and development professionals in a range of implementation-related practice areas. Look for a growing menu of related courses and complete information about the academy in the coming months.

The early registration course fee is \$695. After October 3, the fee is \$745. Register at www.conted.vt.edu/newurbanism/formbasedcodes or call 540/231-5182. For content related questions call Peter Katz at 703 / 706-8114.

This course is presented by:

FBCI Form-Based
Codes
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