



Form-Based Zoning

In contrast to zoning which separates and regulates land uses, form-based zoning systems focus on the character of the built environment’s building size, design, street/ block scale, streetscape and open space standards, as well as cohesion with surrounding development. This allows a variety of uses to co-locate within a zone. The codes mandate development regulations (such as setbacks, building height and parking requirements) and are supplemented by design guidelines to shape how the district should look, feel and be experienced.

BACKGROUND

The [Form-Based Codes Institute](#) outlines several common form-based code elements, including planning documents, public space and building form standards, as well as definitions and program administration.

The emphasis on style of development and the codification of architectural standards – such as opacity, rooflines, façades and signage – allows communities to fold design guidelines into their code. Form-based codes are intended to be complete packages for land use regulation, incorporating street and other public utility, parking, open space, and design regulations in one document.

TOOL PROFILE

Objectives

[Housing in Centers and Near Transit](#)

[Housing Options in Expensive Markets](#)

[Missing Middle Density](#)

Type of Tool

Other Regulatory Tools

Project Type

Single family

Multifamily

Ownership

Rental

Affordability Level

Market-rate incentives and tools

With an increased emphasis on urban form and architectural standards, some builders may worry about increased development costs. Proponents of form-based codes counter this claim by noting that the review process and standards are woven into the code. Administrative clarity and certainty, and a willingness to work with developers, can relieve anxieties about discretionary review. Coordinating a [community outreach](#) strategy to educate developers and property owners about the code and ensuring that permitting and building officials are well-trained and up to date can ease a transition to a form-based code.

RESOURCES

Form Based Codes Institute: [Institute Website](#) (2020)

