FBCI Form-Based Codes Institute | Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

Form-Based Codes Institute Mission

The mission of the Form-Based Codes Institute is to advance zoning reform—through the use of form-based codes—that empowers communities to achieve their vision of livable places, healthy people, and shared prosperity.

Excerpt from the Form-Based Code for South Bend, IN
2021 Driehaus Award winner.

Form-Based Code Defined

A **form-based** code is a land development regulation that fosters **predictable** built results and a **walkable** public realm by using physical form—rather than separation of uses—as the primary basis and focus for the code and standards. Communities can apply form-based codes at different contexts and scales. Form-based codes are legally-binding regulations, not optional guides, and offer municipalities an alternative to conventional zoning for shaping development.

Proposed vision for Stone Avenue in Greenville, SC (Image: Dover, Kohl & Partners)

Standards of Practice

A form-based code must include:

1. A DETAILED PHYSICAL PLAN AND CLEAR VISION, which has been developed and adopted through an inclusive community engagement process.

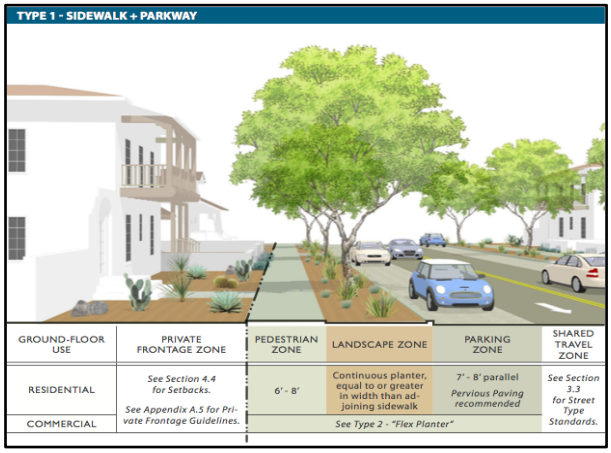
2. A STATEMENT OF INTENT AND PURPOSE, which ties the code to the vision or plan and sets parameters for development of and a framework for waivers and exceptions.

3. BUILDING FORM STANDARDS with specific requirements for building placement and building frontages that will shape public spaces.

4. A REGULATING PLAN that establishes a specific set of standards for each zone shown on a regulating plan.

5. CLEAR AND OBJECTIVE STANDARDS with limited or no discretionary review.

6. PEDESTRIAN SCALE THOROUGHFARE STANDARDS that promote and/or conserve an interconnected street network and pedestrian-scaled blocks.



Public Frontage Standards for the University Neighborhoods form-based code in Palm Desert, CA (Image: Sargent Town Planning)

7. PREDICTABLE PHYSICAL OUTCOMES, which are determined by standards and parameters for physical form—build-to lines, frontage type requirements, and open space features—rather than standards with highly unpredictable physical outcomes—floor area ratio and density—which result in a high-quality urban form and public realm, while still allowing for variety in the size and shape of urban spaces and the design of buildings.

8. COMMON-USE LANGUAGE, GRAPHICS, AND DIAGRAMS, which are unambiguous, clearly labeled, and accurate in their presentation of spatial configurations and relationships.

9. DIVERSITY OF USES AND HOUSING TYPES incorporating standards that encourage this diversity within a walkable distance.

Best Practices

An exemplary form-based code should:

1. be effectively coordinated with other applicable policies and regulations that control development on the same property.

2. be designed and programmed to be regularly updated, convenient for public distribution, and understandable to all members of the community.

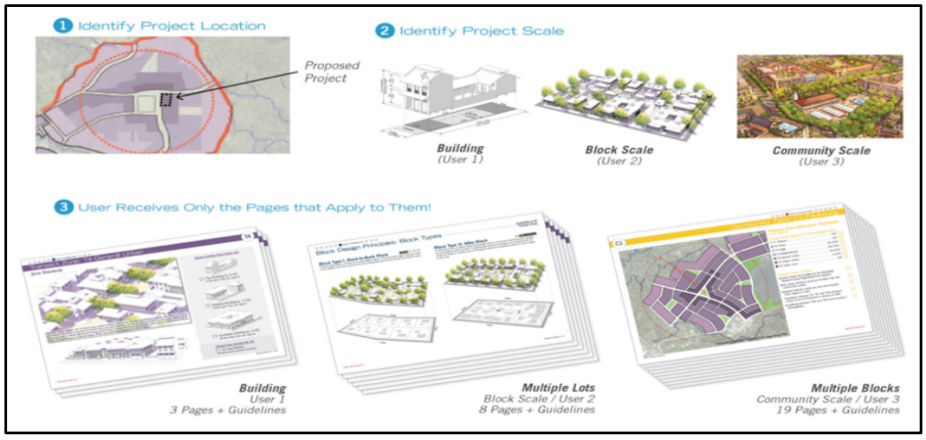
3. produce walkable, identifiable neighborhoods that provide for daily needs to be accessible through multiple transportation options.

4. ensure parking requirements, if included, are compatible with pedestrian-scale urbanism.

5. promote racial equality, social and economic inclusion, and cultural diversity.

6. clearly describe the administrative procedures for project approval in easy-to-understand language, with efficiency in the number of steps, and options for flexibility that still provide results consistent with the vision or plan.

7. include definitions of all technical terms in language that is understandable to everyone who uses or is affected by the code.



The Akanda SmartCode for a urban extension in Liberville, Gabon provides different types of users with simple checklists and a small set of applicable pages to guide them through the coding process (Image: Opticos Design)